STREET SPIRIT

Volume 8, No.12 December, 2002 $1.00

A publication of the American Friends Service Committee

JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Art with a Social Conscience

Christine Hanlon's deeply felt paintings portray the humanity of all those exiled on Desolation Row.

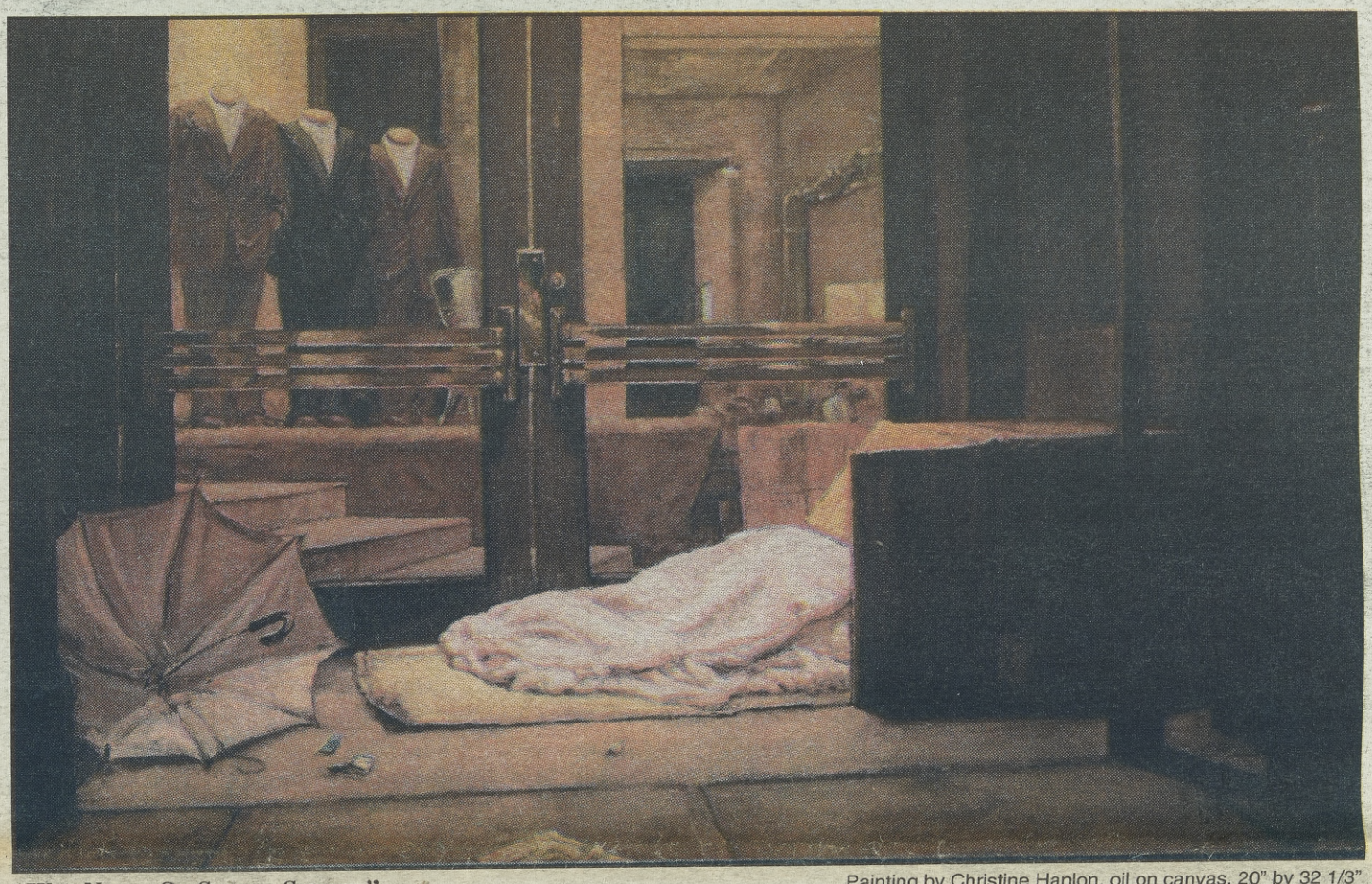
by Terry Messman

Christine Hanlon's beautifully composed images of outcast souls struggling to survive in barren urban landscapes seem to be ripped from today's news stories about increasing poverty in America. Yet, her deeply felt paintings also are timeless in their portrayal of classic themes explored by great painters through the ages.

In "Wet Night On Sutter Street," a homeless man sleeps under a cardboard box outside Wilkes-Bashford, the ultra-expensive clothing store where Mayor Willie Brown shops. Three stylish suits dwell inside a luxurious store — warm, dry and protected from the elements — while a living man is locked outside in the cold and rain. The suits seem to cast eyeless gazes at the homeless man, as unseeing as the eyes of the rich when they overlook the poor in their midst. Bars of gold on the doors separate the two worlds of rich and poor.

"Rhonda's Place" depicts a homeless woman reduced to living in a sidewalk encampment just around the corner from the opulent Sheraton Palace. The gap in our society between lavish wealth and desperate poverty has become a chasm.

On the surface, Hanlon paints vivid images of isolation and alienation in urban America, so her work is sometimes compared to Edward Hopper's stark paintings of loneliness in the impersonal city.



"Wet Night On Sutter Street." Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on canvas, 20" by 32 1/3"

A homeless person sleeps in a cardboard box outside an expensive clothing store in San Francisco on a rainy night.

But Hanlon's art goes far beyond that. She offers a revelation of the intense alienation of destitute castaways barely surviving on hostile streets — people almost never seen in the work of other artists. She paints riveting portraits of people we usually pass by with eyes averted.

In a striking artistic paradox, Hanlon has created beautiful paintings of subjects usually considered so unsightly they must be shunned. She has given places of honor in art galleries to the very people who have been rejected by mainstream society.

Although certain of Hanlon's paintings may seem like topical political commentary, a closer look shows she has created timeless, classic images by using some of the same compositional techniques as her beloved "Old Masters" — painters such as Leonardo da Vinci and Piero della Francesca who used the esoteric art known as "sacred geometry" to create harmonious and beautiful ratios and proportions in their art and sculpture.

Through the centuries, artists have portrayed the dehumanization and suffering of people trapped in inhumane social orders. Van Gogh painted hunger-ravaged peasants in "The Potato Eaters." Goya painted stunning images of the horrors of war, poverty and pestilence. The German artist Kaethe Kollwitz drew heartbreaking sketches of prisoners, war victims, and the hungry, sick and jobless. Ben Shahn created unforgettable portraits of the victims of Nazi brutality, radioactive fall-out, and hunger.

Hanlon's soulful paintings keep that tradition of art with a social conscience alive in our time. Her art gives a human face to those who have been rendered nameless and faceless by social prejudice.

See **Interview with Christine Hanlon** *page 10*



"Faux Street Revisited." **The viewpoint of a homeless woman at ground level, as passers-by hurry past and ignore her.** Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on canvas, 37 1/2" by 84"

A Hard-Fought Victory for Just Cause Oakland

The Just Cause measure is intended to preserve the diversity of Oakland from the corrupting influence of gentrification and the eviction-for-profit system.

by Lynda Carson

Updated figures from the November 5th election gave a long-awaited victory to Measure EE supporters in Oakland. Absentee ballots continued to be counted in the close race long after the election, but as the days went by, the Just Cause ballot initiative, Measure EE, still held a narrow margin of victory at the polls.

It had been an emotional roller-coaster ride as landlords and renters alike anxiously waited for the daily election counts to be posted by the Alameda County Registrar of Voters. Certification of the election results by the registrar is required 29 days after the election, and the Oakland City Council is expected to follow up by certifying the Just Cause initiative at their meeting on December 17. The new anti-eviction laws shall be in effect about 10 days after the City Council certifies the election results, and the City Attorney is expected to enforce the new laws.

When called for their comments about the electoral victory of the Just Cause measure, some of the notorious landlord kingpins who opposed Measure EE either hung up the phone or did not return calls.

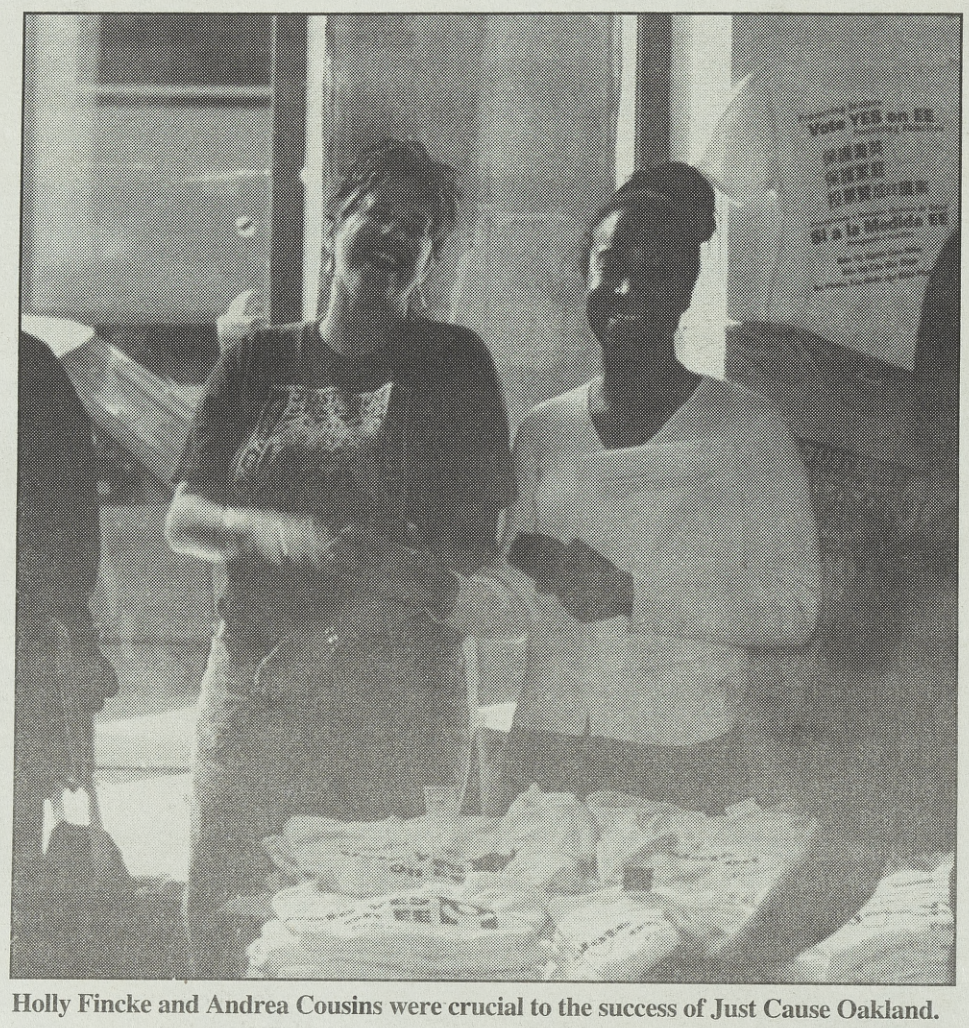
Tenants and supporters of Just Cause Oakland have been excited by the results, even if it has been a long haul to reach this moment, said tenant activist Sue Doyle. During election night, much credit was given to the campaign organizers, and applause roared through the Just Cause headquarters as the well-respected names of Meika Johnson, Andrea Cousins, Ryan Hurley, Adam Gold, Marnie Chow Wang and many others were toasted with love and affection for their tireless efforts to bring Just Cause to a reality in Oakland. Joel Tenya rallied the crowd to a fever pitch of excitement.

As the votes were counted on election night, some of Oakland's finest activists showed up at Just Cause Oakland headquarters to offer support or carouse and dance the night away, while the DJ kept the music flowing along with the food and drinks. The election results flip-flopped back and forth while Just Cause supporters tried to remain upbeat.

As the vote counts were displayed upon the wall for all to see, the revelers' facial expressions changed and contorted along with the numbers, as they swayed one way or another to the incessant chant of the DJ's ministrations. Cries of joy switched to tears of despair for some who were overcome by the emotional impact of such a close race. Others rode it out like the wind on a cool moonlit night, ignoring the numbers and enjoying the excitement of the moment leading up to the grand finale of post-election signs being torn to shreds and tossed into the air while music blasted into the night.

Measure EE leapt out of the gate ahead of the opposition, and after losing ground later that evening, pulled ahead one last time to keep its lead and hold it for the next two weeks as absentee ballots were counted. Realtors, landlords, and tenants alike wondered if the counting of the absentee ballots would ever come to an end.

The Just Cause measure is intended to preserve the diversity of Oakland from the corrupting influence of gentrification and the eviction-for-profit system. Low-income families living in rental housing no longer have to live in constant fear of receiving a no-cause eviction, and their children have gained a new measure of security that they won't be driven out of their homes and schools. Protected from the tyranny of Oakland's notorious landlords, the retired elderly citizens who helped build this town may now bask in their golden years free from the fear of the dreaded no-cause eviction notice.



Holly Fincke and Andrea Cousins were crucial to the success of Just Cause Oakland.

The Just Cause measure restricts landlords to 11 reasons — i.e., just causes — to terminate a tenancy. Oakland voters agreed to some basic rules of fairness by passing Measure EE in opposition to the powers that be in Oakland who have fought against Just Cause for so many years.

During the last election in 2000, more than 20,000 signatures were collected in a failed attempt to bring a Just Cause initiative to the voters; and on two occasions that same year, former Rent Board Commissioner Andrew Wolff pushed a Just Cause measure through the Rent Board to the Oakland City Council, only to have it shot down by corrupt council members who activists charge were in the pocket of the Rental Housing Association of Northern Alameda County.

This time, supporters collected nearly 36,000 signatures to put the measure on the ballot for a vote to offer a modicum of protection to Oakland renters from unfair evictions. It then took a huge effort to get people to the polls and win the very tight margin of victory. Tenant activists and supporters of Measure EE raised nearly $90,000 during the campaign, while being outspent by realtor/landlord lobbies that raised over $500,000 in opposition.

The race got down and dirty when the opposition to Measure EE spent a fortune to flood the city with mailers portraying the renters of Oakland as drug addicts, sex offenders, and beer-swilling bikers who could never be evicted if the Just Cause initiative was passed into law. Some of these obscene mailers were taken very personally by the renters and activists who worked on the campaign, including Measure EE supporter Councilwoman Nancy Nadel, who found her picture on a mailer in opposition to Measure EE.

According to Holly Fincke, a longtime supporter and organizer with Just Cause Oakland, the hardest part of the campaign was watching the opposition spend half a million dollars on hideous campaign mailings, television commercials, and billboards against Measure EE. In contrast, Fincke said, Just Cause sent out three mailers in support of Measure EE, targeting the absentee voters, apartments in the flatlands, and some areas in the Oakland hills.

"We had a principled campaign supported by many unions and nonprofits such as BOSS, ACORN, and APEN," said Fincke. The easiest part of the campaign was rounding up volunteers — due in part to the momentum of the first campaign which won the hearts and minds of the people, leaving the realtors and big landlords isolated in their opposition to Measure EE, Fincke said.

Alaskan-born attorney Hunter Pyle, a chairperson for the field operations of Just Cause, said that the hardest part of the campaign was watching an unscrupulous adversary with money to burn flood the city with negative mailings against the renters of Oakland and Measure EE. The mailers were nothing but lies, said Pyle.

Pyle credits Just Cause for not having any leaders with egos that may have misdirected the campaign for personal reasons, and believes the success was due to the many volunteers who were willing to take on different roles as needed while the campaign unfolded day to day. This was a huge step forward for Oakland tenants and will lead to long-term goals for the betterment of the community, said Pyle.

The negative aspects of the campaign in opposition to Measure EE took a strange twist when the *Montclarion* reported on an in-kind donation of $15,000 that flowed from the coffers of Measure DD to the opposition of Measure EE during the campaign.

Attorney Hunter Pyle of Just Cause said that the hardest part of the campaign was watching an unscrupulous adversary with money to burn flood the city with negative mailings against the renters of Oakland and Measure EE.

More sparks flew when a mailer sent out across Oakland supporting Measure DD opposed Measure EE at the same time. Oaklanders had to ask themselves why Councilman Danny Wan or Councilwoman Jane Brunner would feign support for Measure EE while participating at the same time in a campaign that donated such a large sum of money in opposition to Measure EE. Brunner and Wan were huge backers of Measure DD, a Lake Merritt bond initiative, and many refused to believe that Measure DD campaign manager Larry Tramutola would decide to attack Measure EE without the consent of his superiors.

Former Oakland Rent Board Commissioner Andrew Wolff was on the drafting committee of Just Cause and assisted Anne Omura, Laura Lane, Debbie Rocher and Randy Shaw of San Francisco in writing the ordinance. It was critical to rewrite the ordinance in such a way as to create the least amount of resistance, and to remain moderate so as to gain its passage by the voters, said Wolff.

Using the old ordinance as a first draft, they studied a few cities with existing rent control and just cause laws, then spent some time with Paul Wortal and Randy Shaw, who helped as a review committee so that they could figure out what would or would not work in gaining voter support. This way, they could accomplish in one fell swoop what may have taken years to achieve in other cities.

The Campaign for Renters Rights has organized an evening of guest speakers, including attorney Andrew Wolff, to explain to the public how Just Cause was envisioned to protect the renters of Oakland from unfair evictions, with a question-and-answer period afterwards.
When: Monday December 9, 2002, 7-9 p.m.
Where: SEIU 250 Meeting Hall, Oakland, 560 20th Street, near 19th St. BART Station.
For more information, contact the Campaign for Renters Rights: 510/ 595-5545.

Subscribe to *Street Spirit!*

Street Spirit is published by the **American Friends Service Committee.** Homeless vendors receive 50 papers a day for free, earn income, and educate the community about social justice issues. American Friends Service Committee shoulders the entire printing costs of more than $3,000.00 each month to give our vendors a job providing a positive alternative to panhandling. Please **donate** or **subscribe** to *Street Spirit* ! Help us remain an independent voice for justice!

❒ **I enclose $25 for one year's subscription.**
❒ **I enclose a donation of** ❒ **$100** ❒ **$50** ❒ **$ 25**

December 2002

Send Donations to:
Street Spirit, AFSC
65 Ninth St.
San Francisco, CA 94103-1401

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ **State:**_____ **Zip:** _____

Struggle for Respite Care Heats Up in Berkeley

It is long past time for Berkeley officials to study what other cities are doing for sick, disabled and dying homeless people, and create a respite care facility.

by Terry Messman

Berkeley officials are quick to pride themselves on being the most progressive and generous city around when it comes to providing homeless services. It is the common mantra of the mayor and City Council members that Berkeley does more than nearly any other city in providing for the needs of its homeless citizens.

Now, these officials have been challenged by a small, yet deeply committed band of homeless people and activists who have camped out in Martin Luther King Park to press their demands that the City Council implement a respite care facility for seriously ill homeless people, an expansion of winter shelter beds, a safe and legal campground, and long-term solutions such as permanent housing.

Given Berkeley's pretense that it provides more homeless services than other cities, it is especially shocking that, after all these years, the city has failed to create a respite care facility for homeless people with serious medical conditions. It amounts to unconscionable neglect on the part of both the Berkeley City Council and the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, who are responsible under state law to make sure indigent citizens have access to health care.

In past issues, *Street Spirit* has documented the serious neglect surrounding health care for homeless people in the East Bay. Due to the cost-cutting practices of HMOs, hospitals dump unhoused patients long before they have recovered enough to hit the streets. It is one thing to prematurely discharge a middle-class patient who is returning to a safe, warm home with a family to help them recuperate.

But homeless patients who are hospitalized for cancer, diabetes, pneumonia, AIDS, or major surgery are, all too often, released from area hospitals with nothing more than a bus token or a shelter referral. Recuperation takes place in the worst circumstances possible. It is scarcely possible to recover from a serious illness when you are dumped from a hospital and then faced with exposure to the elements, inadequate food, lack of sleep, and the unsanitary conditions in the street. A convalescent patient is exposed to communicable diseases in the shelters and sheer exhaustion on an endless march to nowhere.

One of the most commonly prescribed medical guidelines for recovery is bed rest and sleep; yet, that is impossible for many homeless people. After spending an uncomfortable night in a barracks-style shelter, people with major health problems are forced out of the shelter to spend the entire day wandering the streets, exposed to cold and rain and stress.

A respite care facility in Berkeley is a crucial need for homeless people with chronic or terminal illnesses, or serious post-surgical conditions who need to convalesce after a period of hospitalization.

Bob Mills, a longtime nonviolent activist, is one of the homeless people who kicked off a new campaign for respite care by organizing a speak-out at the Berkeley City Council meeting on November 19. Following this spirited event, about 25 homeless people set up the "Bushville 2002" camp at Martin Luther King Park to call for a respite care facility, a legal campground and more housing and shelter.



A community meeting at the Bushville camp in MLK Park. From left, Yukon Hannibal, Giggles, Michael Diehl, Dan McMullan and Bob Mills. Lydia Gans photo

Mills found out the hard way how desperately a respite care facility is needed in Berkeley. Mills had been living on the streets and in the parks of Berkeley for months when he plunged into his own health-care crisis.

He was diagnosed with diabetes and a degenerative bone disease; and after months of living on the streets exposed to the elements, he also came down with two infections, one a bad case of strep throat.

"The doctor required me to have two weeks bed rest while he was pumping me full of antibiotics," Mills said. "Well forget that, because I found that there was no shelter that would allow me to have two weeks bed rest. So I had to spend that time out on the streets."

Mills had run up against one of the most unyielding shelter regulations of all. Most shelters have an inflexible requirement that all residents must leave the premises first thing in the morning and be out on the streets all day — no matter if they're a mother with infants or young children, no matter if they are physically disabled and in a wheelchair, no matter if they're convalescing after surgery, no matter if they're sick and need bed rest.

Mills tried in vain to get the shelter staff to honor his doctor's orders and simply allow him to stay inside for two weeks. Bureaucracies, even nonprofit bureaucracies, can become blinded by their rules and fail to serve those most in need.

Mills' experiences led him to conclude that it was of life-and-death urgency to fight for the rights of homeless people to receive medical care. "We have chronically ill homeless people sleeping on the streets," he said. "We have people in wheelchairs sleeping in doorways because we have no respite care. There's no place to get the kind of medical care and rest and good nutrition you need if you're homeless and have a serious illness."

Mills did find some help. Health Care for the Homeless provided motel vouchers. But it was too little, too late. "The fact of the matter is, I needed that respite care during that period of time I was sick and being given antibiotics," he said. "So instead of the two weeks it would have taken me to recover, I was sick for over three months with these infections."

This is one of the most common side-effects of being homeless — lingering illnesses that won't go away because of the poor sanitary conditions, lack of bed rest, lack of access to medical care, lack of sleep and exposure to the elements — a prescription to make sickness last longer.

Mills said, "The same holds true for many others on the streets. A woman who was staying at one of the shelters in Berkeley was diagnosed with cancer. She was at a particular stage of her illness when she needed respite care, desperately. But there was none available. She's out there on the streets still struggling with this cancer. I've heard other horror stories of people who have AIDS or cancer that are forced to live on the street because the shelter system is not built for respite care."

In her report for the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, entitled "Medical Respite Services for Homeless People," Marsha McMurray-Avila quoted several medical studies to demonstrate how prevalent serious health problems are for the homeless population.

"As a consequence of the poor nutrition, lack of adequate hygiene, exposure to violence and to the elements, increased contact with communicable diseases, and fatigue that accompany the conditions of homelessness, people without homes suffer from ill health at much higher rates than people living in stable housing. Several studies have found that one-third to one-half of homeless adults have some form of physical illness. At least half of homeless children have a physical illness and they are twice as likely as housed children to have such illnesses."

The study found that it is next to impossible for a person with no home to recuperate after an early discharge. Too often, the homeless are dumped from hospitals with prescriptions for medicine they can't afford and instructions for medical care and rest they simply can't follow.

McMurray-Avila's national study of the health care needs of homeless people found that a respite care facility with medical staff and full-time access to beds is essential. Her study concluded: "Clearly, homeless people with these health conditions — ranging from pneumonia to knife wounds to risky pregnancies — need extended access to a safe bed in which they can rest, adequate restroom facilities, nutritious food and clean water, secure storage and/or refrigeration for medications, assistance with dressing changes and general nursing support."

That vision of a humane and comprehensive respite care facility is exactly what Mills and many of the other homeless people camped out near the Berkeley City Council Chambers are fighting to win. Michael Diehl, a community organizer for BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency) described several cases of homeless people struggling with serious illnesses and severe disabilities who are suffering on the streets of Berkeley.

Testifying at the November 19th meeting of the Berkeley City Council, Diehl said, "A lot of people with physical disabilities are winding up on the streets — people in wheelchairs, people with emphysema, people who don't have support services. I met a woman named Gwen who had a tumor operation; she left the hospital and wound up on the streets. That doesn't seem right that she would be on the streets right after surgery."

Many other cities have long since established respite care facilities with professional medical staff where homeless people can mend and heal.

The Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program began providing respite services for homeless people way back in 1985. Boston's McInnis House and Snead House provide residential recuperative care for homeless adults who are too ill for the hardships of the streets and shelters. They offer 24-hour RN care, physicians and physician assistants seven days a week.

Christ House in Washington, D.C., is a 32-bed medical respite facility with a full range of medical and support services for sick homeless people. Other models of respite care have been created in Chicago, Denver, Seattle and Albuquerque.

Berkeley officials cannot claim ignorance nor take years to study how to build a proper respite care facility. The models already have been created, and it is past time for city officials to study what other cities are doing for sick, disabled and dying homeless people, and create a respite care facility in Berkeley.

Protesters at the Bushville encampment are also calling for other practical, reasonable solutions that would enable homeless people to survive this winter. They are demanding a legal campground, expanded housing and shelter beds, and an end to the criminalization of homeless people.

At the rally before the City Council meeting, Roberta Hopkins, a homeless woman, said, "I'd love to have a safe place to sleep where there's fellowship and sisterhood. The homeless people should unite against discrimination." Bushville organizer Yukon Hannibal urged the gathering to form a freedom colony.

Attorney Osha Neumann said that shelters in Berkeley are full, but people are still arrested for sleeping outdoors. During a recent torrential downpour, Neumann said, homeless people sought shelter under overhanging structures and were given tickets for trespassing.

Edith Monk-Hallberg, a member of the Berkeley Homeless Commission, emphasized that she was speaking as a private citizen, not on behalf of the commission. She said, "I personally support some sort of homeless encampment, or Bushville, because the shelters are full this winter. The shelters are full so we need to be creative and think of alternatives."

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is operated by the **Berkeley Emergency Food and Housing Project.**

Editor, Layout, Design: Terry Messman

Contributors: Claire J. Baker, Clu Carradine, Lynda Carson, Lorant Chovan, Lynda Cobden, Toni Cook, Michael Creedon, Alexandra Cuff, B.N. Duncan, Randy Fingland, Leonard Roy Frank, Lydia Gans, Christine Hanlon, Maureen Hartmann, Helena Kyriakou, Richard List, Peter Marin, Kevin McFarren, Osha Neumann, Christa Occhiogrosso, Eric Robertson, Alex Salazar, Husayn Sayfuddiyn, Chris Trian, Julia Vinograd, A.W. Woodall, George Wynn

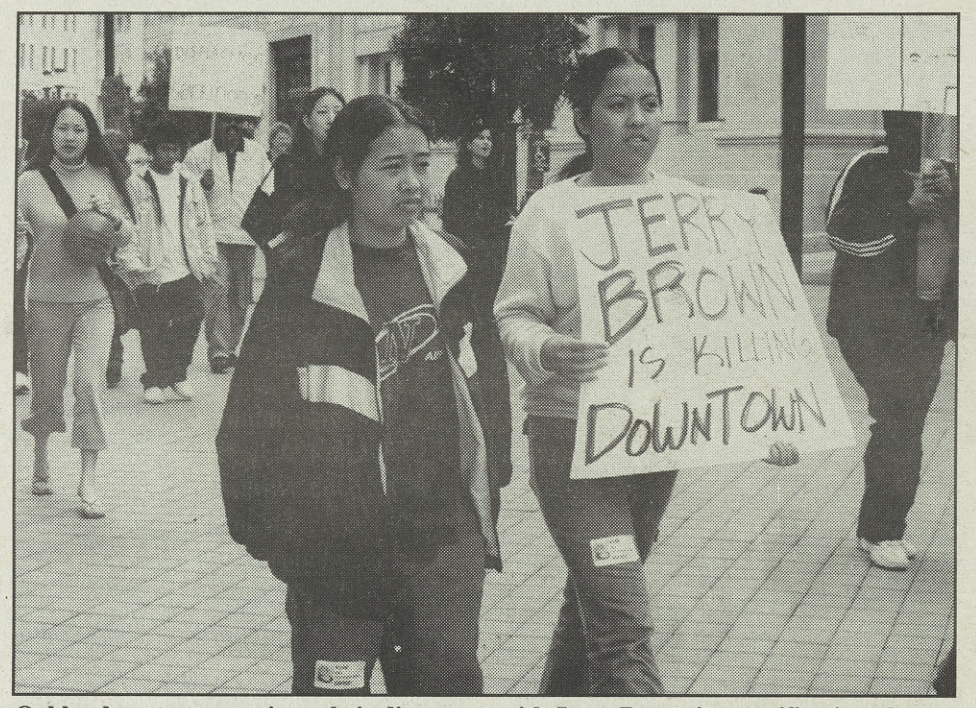
All works copyrighted by the authors.

Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, poems, photos and art.
Write to: **Terry Messman, Street Spirit, 65 Ninth St., San Francisco, CA 94103-1401.**
Phone: **415/565-0201.** Fax: **415/565-0204**
E-mail to: **spirit@afsc.org**

Unanswered Questions About Oakland's Uptown

In a city with a severe shortage of affordable housing, why is Jerry Brown so eager to give $40-$70 million to Forest City to build upscale housing for the rich?

by Terry Messman



Oakland protesters register their discontent with Jerry Brown's gentrification plans.

At a time when Oakland has thousands of people who are homeless and tens of thousands who need affordable housing, Mayor Jerry Brown is spearheading an effort to give a multibillion-dollar corporate developer a city subsidy estimated at $40 to $70 million to build housing for the already affluent.

Affordable housing advocates are concerned that such an immense subsidy to Forest City Enterprises, a Cleveland-based corporate developer with $4 billion in assets, could deplete city funds for affordable housing for years to come.

Currently, Forest City proposes to build 800-1,000 residential units in the Uptown area between Telegraph and San Pablo Avenue and 18th and 20th Streets. Nearly all the housing units would be one or two-bedroom apartments, and 80 percent would be rented out at market rate.

The City of Oakland could sink $40 to $70 million on one grandiose project to help Jerry Brown keep his fading campaign promise to bring in 10,000 new residents, but truly low-income families and homeless people will not be able to live in this massively subsidized development.

Forest City has pledged to keep 20 percent of the units affordable to people who earn 50 percent of the area's median income, or about $45,000. Needless to say, no very low-income renter could ever afford such an "affordable unit," let alone a homeless person. Low-income families largely would be locked out due to the preponderance of one and two-bedroom units.

Recently, affordable housing advocates may have made some progress in influencing Forest City to up its affordable housing units to 25 percent of the overall housing mix. But serious questions remain about whether any low-income people could afford any of the proposed housing in the Uptown project, and how big the city's subsidy ultimately will be.

Alex Salazar, a longtime tenants' rights activist, said, "We're greatly concerned anytime developers from outside the city come in and start displacing tenants and don't replace the affordable housing stock that has been depleted in Oakland. Anytime a developer comes in and gets the ear of the mayor because they have lots of money and capital, and are tied to his political campaign, that's a great concern to us. For the people that we serve, to have that money stolen away by an outside company, it's just horrendous. It should never happen."

Jerry Brown has been behaving like an "imperial mayor" throughout the negotiations with Forest City. He doesn't want public comment, let alone dissent, on one of the largest developments in Oakland history, and he has repeatedly failed to listen to the reasonable concerns of Oakland's affordable housing advocates.

Last summer, Brown imposed a gag order to prevent city staff from criticizing the project. Unnamed city staff had told the *Oakland Tribune* that the size of the subsidy could deplete Oakland's Redevelopment Agency and leave it with no money to subsidize other affordable housing projects, and faulted Forest City for demanding high profits and adding in extremely high operating costs.

Oakland never put the Uptown project up for a public bid and never issued a Request for Proposals. Brown's plan to give Forest City one of the largest subsidies in city history was an insider deal with a huge corporate developer that also happens to be a big donor to Democratic political campaigns, including past donations to Brown and Oakland City Council members.

According to inside sources familiar with this development process, the City of Oakland had six unsolicited proposals for developing the area. Those proposals came in without a formal Request for Proposals (RfP), so it begs the question of how many proposals would have come in if normal channels had been followed and an RfP issued, and if this project hadn't been hotwired for Forest City from the beginning.

Jens Hillmer, an urban economic analyst in Oakland's Community and Economic Development Agency (CEDA) who is managing the Forest City project, said, "There has not been an RfP. Forest City has been working on this project in fits and spurts since late 1999, early 2000. No, there was never an RfP. We invited them to resubmit on a couple occasions. There have been three exclusive negotiating agreements now."

Amanda Brown-Stevens, a policy analyst for City Councilmember Nancy Nadel, said, "It's certainly unfortunate that it never went through an RfP process. I think that it's certainly a reason to scrutinize the numbers even more carefully than one would otherwise. In some ways, Forest City did step up when no one else was interested. But I do think it's definitely a reason to look twice at the numbers and make sure there is accountability at every level. If there's not going to be as much push for accountability from the mayor, then the public has to step up and make sure that happens."

Salazar said Mayor Brown's gag orders and closed bidding process were "absolutely a concern." He added, "The reason they put in those gag orders is to undermine local community efforts to address the real problems that are in Oakland and to put in gag orders to limit the amount of public participation to the bare minimum. That shows how Brown does not have local community support for the project. That's why they keep it a secret."

Another element of secrecy that has outraged housing advocates and even City Councilmembers is that, after years of planning this project, Forest City recently came to a council committee asking for approval of the Uptown design, while refusing to include a price tag for the massive city subsidies they were requesting.

Forest City asked for blind approval of the Uptown plan at a meeting of the Community and Economic Development Committee on October 22, even though they provided no estimate of the project's cost to the City, nor any analysis of the per-unit subsidy. Housing advocates at the meeting insisted that Forest City show what the costs will be, and the council committee agreed and forced Forest City to come back to the council in December and put a price tag on the Uptown plan.

In a city in the midst of a staggering housing crisis, the major priority should be developing housing for longtime Oakland residents, not housing for the young urban professionals that Brown envisions immigrating into Oakland to make the Uptown area more upscale. If the city is prepared to spend tens of millions of dollars to subsidize housing, it should build housing that is affordable to very low-income and homeless people — not people making over $100,000 a year, but people making $10,000 or less.

Rev. Andrew Meckstroth, minister of First Baptist Church, is concerned that the Uptown project would displace many low-income people, families and seniors because of the gentrification and rising rents that would inevitably follow. Meckstroth's church is located at 22nd and Telegraph, right next to the Uptown area.

Rev. Meckstroth said, "We are concerned about so many of the folks who currently live here on the periphery of society needing affordable housing. There's kind of this domino effect that begins when you have lots of upscale housing built; the housing around it becomes more gentrified and it just kind of ripples out and pushes people on the periphery even further out on the periphery."

Rev. Meckstroth's church serves seniors who already have been pushed out of housing by rising rents in Oakland, and very low-income people who cannot find housing at all. He wonders why Mayor Brown and the City Council aren't rushing to build housing for the truly needy.

"It's the philosophy of the leadership of the city, the folks that hold the power right now, that they really don't care," Meckstroth said. "They're not motivated to do the things that would replace the housing that is being lost, and to provide housing for those who don't have it.

"So my concern about Forest City is that it's building houses for people that are not residents here and may never come here, and that it's being subsidized by the city even though it's not generating anything useful for the people who already are here. I just don't see the way Forest City's development was originally configured as being effective in providing for the housing needs of the people of Oakland."

Meckstroth noted wryly that his congregation could benefit by being in the midst of hundreds of affluent new residents moving into the neighborhood. But as a pastor, he said, he had to be more concerned about the fate of poor people who would be pushed out by rising rents and evictions. To make way for the Uptown project, the City of Oakland shut down the Westerner Hotel, a low-rent SRO with 34 units of very affordable housing.

Rev. Meckstroth said, "I've seen these older folks that have lost their places already during the upturn of the late '90s. The city officials fought against any kind of Just Cause ordinance. We've also seen families on the periphery doubling and tripling up, and it does not provide well for children to be in situations where they have to move from one bad housing situation to another, or be in a house with three families sleeping on the floor of a living room. There's a call for the folks elected by the people to take care of the people and not take care of outside developers."

Salazar voiced similar concerns, saying, "It's serving a population who are mostly at market rate, who can afford a higher rent, and who are wealthier. It's not serving Oakland families and it's not serving local tenants who are very low-income in the neighborhood, and I'm sure are going to be displaced. Without the replacement of family units and the replacement of senior housing, where are the people who will be displaced going to go? How are they going to stay in the neighborhood?"

Sean Heron, executive director of East Bay Housing Organizations (EBHO), said, "An enormous development of this magnitude really should be making a contribution to meeting the affordable housing needs of the community."

Heron said that EBHO is a strong supporter of building more housing downtown. "But we've said all along that when you build market-rate housing downtown you also need to address the affordable housing needs. It needs to be part and parcel of that plan; it can't be an afterthought."

EBHO has taken the lead in trying to negotiate with city officials to ensure a better mix of affordable housing in the Uptown project. EBHO is pushing forward its alternative vision in partnership with the Coalition for Workforce Housing, an organization that includes many housing groups, homeless service providers, labor unions and church groups.

The Coalition for Workforce Housing has four major demands, Heron explained.

1. Twenty-five percent of the Uptown development should be affordable.

2. Housing should be affordable to a range of incomes, from people making as little as $10,000 a year to people making $45,000 (50 percent of median income).

3. A better mix of unit types should include at least 30 percent of the affordable units having three or more bedrooms to accommodate families with children. Heron said, "Low-income families are having one of the most difficult times finding housing in the city. They're the folks really in crisis."

4. Replacement of all SRO hotel units lost when the City evicted residents of the Westerner Hotel to make room for the Uptown project. This would ensure that some units house homeless persons.

Troubling questions remain about the relationship of Brown to Forest City executives. *Oakland Tribune* reporter Robert Gammon reported on June 24, 2002, that Brown has close personal ties with Sacramento lobbyist Peter Finnegan, a longtime friend who worked for Brown when he was governor. Finnegan's wife Natalie Berg is regional president of Forest City, and is the sister-in-law of Albert Ratner, co-chair of Forest City's board.

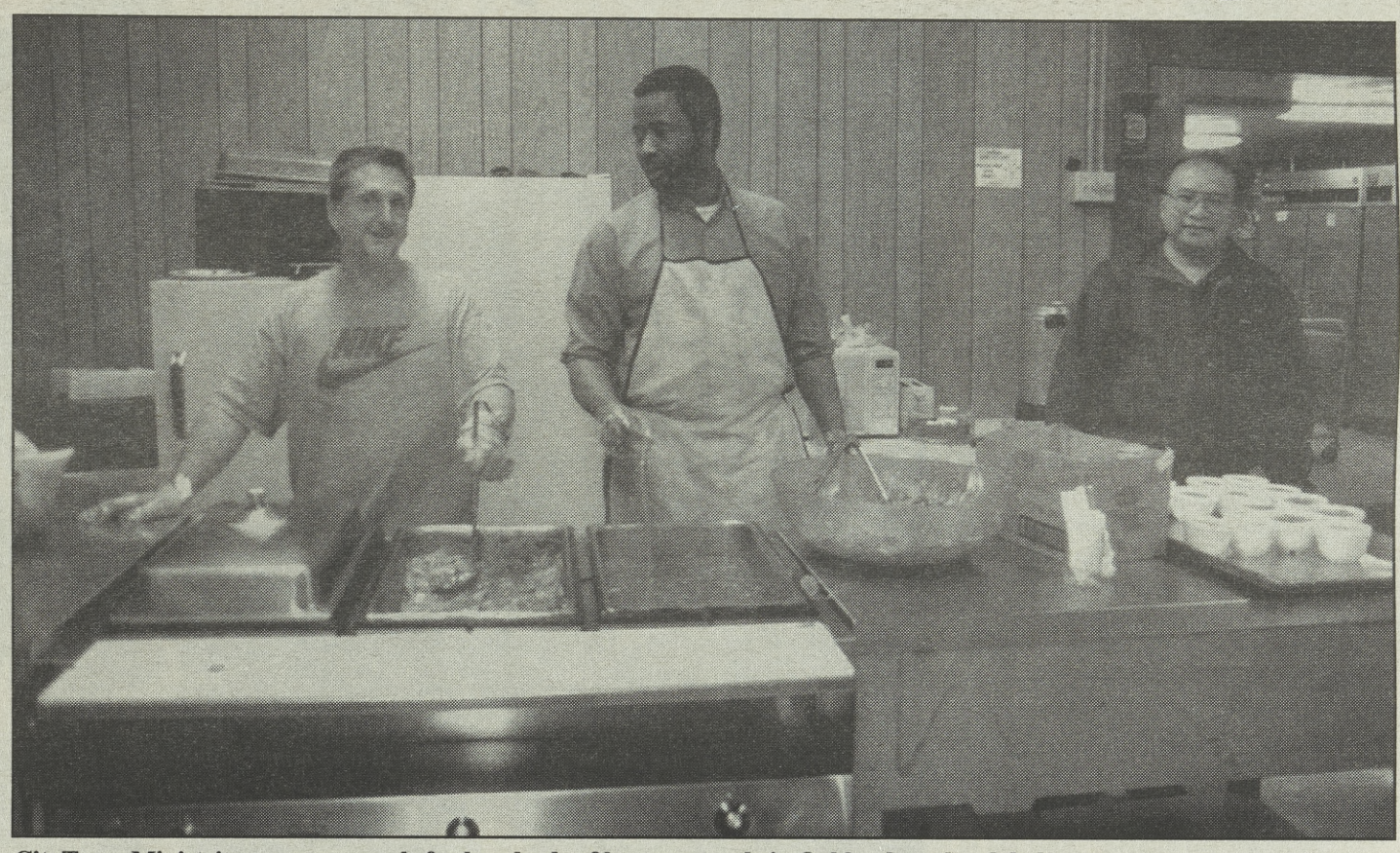
Gammon's report also revealed that the Forest City development team contributed $11,200 to Brown and members of the City Council, and that Brown's political action committee received $25,000 from Forest City's architect on the Uptown project.

Freedom from Hunger Is a Human Right

"In a country so rich, it's obscene to have hunger and homelessness."

— Anuradha Mittal, co-director, Food First

Story and photo by A.W. Woodall



CityTeam Ministries prepares meals for hundreds of hungry people in Oakland, as the global economy creates more hunger.

The musk of unwashed bodies mingles with the aroma of food as a line of weary men snakes through the hall of the CityTeam Ministries' soup kitchen and shelter in Oakland. No one looks around the hall that is almost void of personal touches. Moving slowly ahead, one man reads while others just stare straight ahead at a sterile room where the food is served cafeteria-style on plastic trays: ravioli, green beans, chocolate cake, and a drink.

By the time the last in line reaches the food, seconds are already heaped on the trays. After only 30 minutes, people here and there begin filling containers, plastic bags, or whatever they have handy, with leftover food. They'll take it with them as security against hunger, or for friends.

CityTeam does its best to help people ravaged by poverty, whether it's because of drug addiction, psychological problems, or just the effects of the recent economic bust, which has put two million out of work since last year. Families and seniors come from as far as Hayward to pick up food boxes the ministry provides monthly, said Alyssa Penman, the Rescue Mission manager. The economic bust is making it hard for people to find work, and, as a result, they are seeking food, she added.

This scenario is repeated all over California, the nation, and throughout the world, with only variations on the theme. The Oakland-based organization Food First has noticed the extent of hunger, and a human rights movement is taking place in its deceptively quiet offices. Also known as the Institute for Food and Development Policy, Food First is resisting economic inequality and food deprivation by dissecting the structures behind poverty and applying the principles of human rights to find solutions.

There is enough food to feed the world, said Food First co-director Anuradha Mittal. The problem is who controls access to it, and on what principles access rests.

Over 50 years since the signing of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 28 years since Food First was founded by Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, authors of *Diet for a Small Planet*, there is still hunger.

Increasingly, hunger has an American face: 36 million faces, 22 million adults and 14 million children.

That is 4.5 percent of the 800 million people on earth who are "food insecure," meaning they do not have enough food to eat, some or all of the time. It means not knowing where the next meal will come from, or if there will be a next meal. And contrary to the image of the hungry as uneducated, lazy, and non-white, another reality is emerging from studies revealing a prevalence of poverty in white, black and Latino families with children under 18 where at least one working adult is present who minimally has a high school education.

FOOD FIRST

Whether Food First is out on the road with their California Human Rights Bus Tour visiting rural communities, working with farmers and cooperatives in Latin America, or in Qatar, they struggle for the right to food, to jobs with a living wage, and to land or resources sufficient to produce enough food based on Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that declares:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, any medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

Although the UDHR is not legally binding, it provides the standards for governments around the world concerning what they can or cannot do to citizens, as well as what they should do for them, based on the inherent dignity of all human beings. International covenants, in contrast, back up the UDHR standards and legally bind ratifying countries.

In recognizing the importance of economic factors, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights gave citizens a legal claim to fair wages, reasonable employment demands, access to education, and the right to form, and participate in, trade unions.

The U.S. Senate refuses to acknowledge economic, social and cultural rights and has not ratified the Covenant. Rights have traditionally been defined as the right to private wealth and open elections, at home and abroad. But, political rights ring hollow for the people seeking refuge at the CityTeam Ministries kitchen, and the 1.3 billion people in the world subsisting on one dollar a day.

Food First is revealing how policies that lead to hunger in the rest of the world are implicated in the dark side of American prosperity that, according to Mittal, has created the highest inequality of wealth in the world. This inequality makes it possible for many American children to be at high risk for obesity while 12 million other American children may go hungry.

President Bush has promised to "leave no child behind," but the United States refuses to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, putting it in the company of the only other non-signing country, Somalia, according to Mittal.

A RACE TO THE BOTTOM

"In a country so rich, it's obscene to have hunger and homelessness," declares Mittal. Whether it is called structural adjustment in India and Zambia, or welfare reform in the United States, the effect is the same, "a race to the bottom."

Republicans and Democrats have struck a bargain for $16.5 billion a year in welfare funding, with $300 million going to programs to promote premarital education and counseling, a third of which states must cover. Bush called this "good and sound and compassionate public policy," in an address to an Anacostia church, reported in the *Washington Post*.

In America, welfare reform is turning into a for-profit enterprise, said Christine Ahn, the New Voices Fellow working at Food First. She described how state governments are increasingly outsourcing the administration of welfare-to-work programs to private companies, like Lockheed Martin, which Ahn says teach them to "look good and look obedient," instead of how to avoid becoming one of the 8.4 million unemployed in the United States.

There are reports of workers being coerced to take and keep dead-end jobs because profits for the companies running the programs depend on how long the worker stays placed in the job. "In this economy, when you fall through the cracks someone benefits," says Mittal.

And, there is increasing evidence that welfare reform has proven less effective at helping Americans become self-sufficient than the dropping numbers of welfare recipients suggest.

If a single mother relies on government assistance, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) restrictions will force her to decide between education and employment to improve her ability to feed her family. If she chooses education, she is likely to lose TANF funding.

If she chooses a job, funds for childcare and transportation end. In an increasingly tight job market, her job is likely to pay minimum wage. But, the minimum wage has not kept pace with the rising cost of living. If an adult works in a minimum-wage job, the cost of basic necessities consumes such a disproportionate amount of income there is often not enough left over after the cost of food for basic requirements like housing, utilities, and medicine.

In *Hunger: The Faces and Facts*, a 2001 study by America's Second Harvest (ASH), of the 439 randomly selected individuals surveyed who sought food bank aid (of whom 37 percent were employed) almost half were not able to buy sufficient food, nearly half were not able to afford utilities, and 28 percent had to choose between food and medicine or medical care.

Rent will be a heavy burden as a full-time minimum-wage worker could not afford the fair market rent for a two-bedroom unit anywhere in America during 2001, the National Low Income Housing Coalition showed in the ASH study.

"Hard work is no barrier against hunger," said Suzan Bateson, executive director of the Alameda County Community Food Bank.

Food stamps are an underused supplement because mandatory fingerprinting and a limitation on car ownership confront applicants, even if the car is used as transportation to work and obtaining food, said George Manalo-LeClaire of the California Food Policy Advocates. "They really have to hit rock bottom before they are helped," he said. Only 20 percent of eligible adults have signed up, he added. And 90 percent of households receiving food stamps said the amount is not enough to last more than two weeks, reported the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Growing food does not translate into food security, either. Paradoxically, in Fresno County, where agriculture is a $3.5 billion business, 41 percent of low-income families are food insecure, a recent UCLA study found. The gap between food production and food consumption is attributed to the dominance of commercial farms, which grow for export outside the area and outside the country.

Argentina shares a similar story. In the 5th largest food-producing country in the world, an estimated 11,000 children die of starvation every year, according to the Argentine Health Minister. Argentina is emblematic of the problem faced by other countries relying heavily on export revenue. Although Argentina could produce enough food for ten times the population, prices on the domestic market are too low. If farms are entrenched in the export system, they may not be able to afford a shift to domestic-oriented food production.

Countries should protect their peoples' right to feed themselves, said Mittal, and only then worry about exporting food.

Argentina shows how hard this is to do in the midst of global economic strategies. Farmers will sell to the highest bidder, probably foreign markets, particularly if jobs do not pay the people enough to support domestic prices.

The problems share an open border.

"We ended welfare as we've known it, yet it is not a post-poverty America," Bush conceded in the Anacostia address.

He was correct: on a typical American day, there are between 400,000 to 600,000 households unsure whether they can put dinner on the table.

THE HUNGER STOPS HERE

Our commitment to human dignity is challenged by persistent poverty and raging disease, declared President Bush in a recent UN statement.

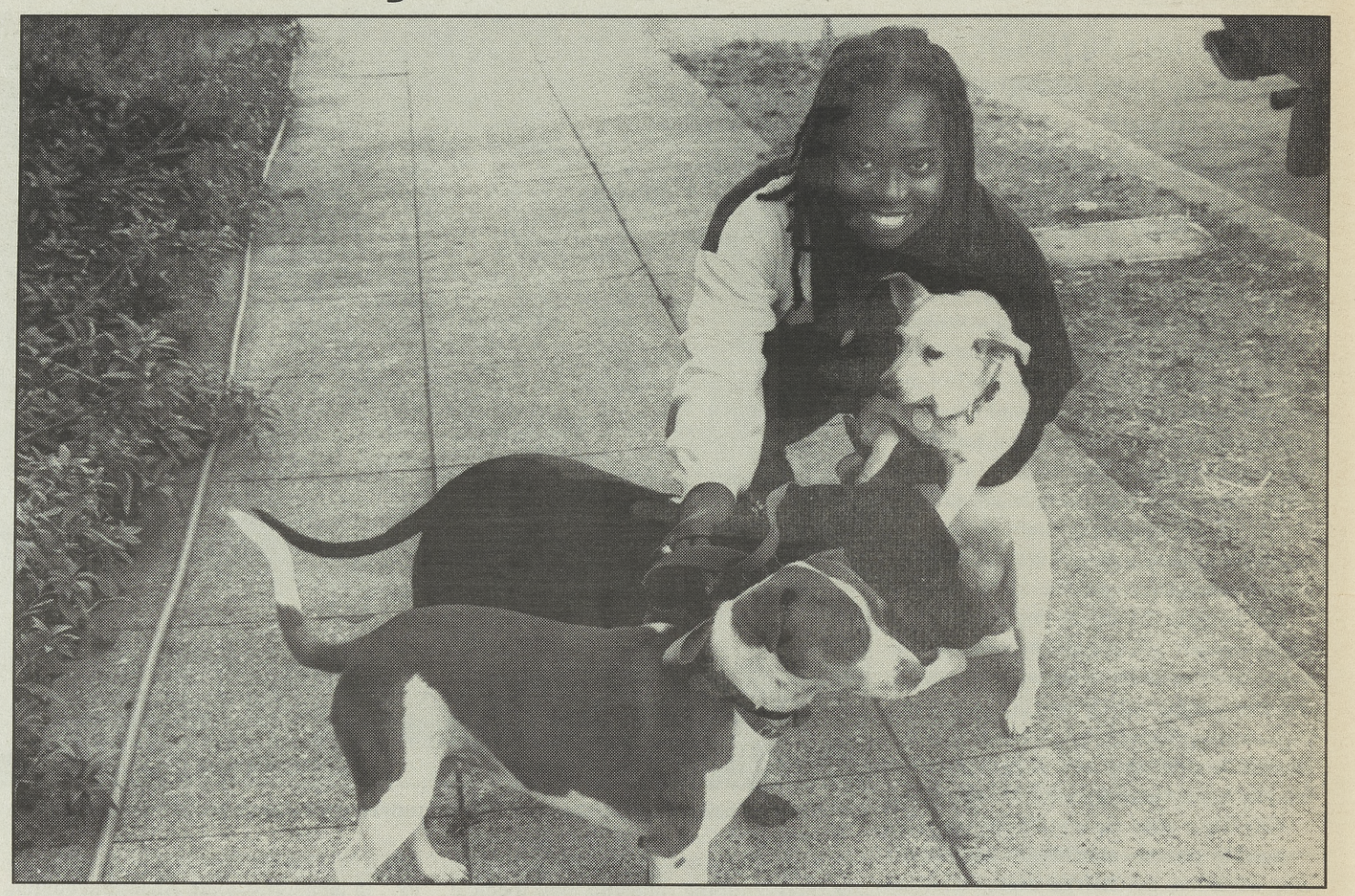
According to Food First, there are three ways to ensure the dignity of the world's

See **Food Is a Human Right** *page 13*

One Heartbeat Away from Homelessness

Corona describes the shock of suddenly becoming homeless. "I cried many a night. I thought, why, why me? I didn't do anything. I must have done something."

by Lydia Gans



Corona Littlejohn on the streets of Berkeley with her three dogs, Hanna, Sula and Toby. Lydia Gans photo

Sometimes a life can change drastically almost over night, like a bright, sunny path ending suddenly at the edge of a cliff. Corona had always taken care of herself, and had worked all sorts of jobs. She had been a dancer and a construction worker, had worked in a bank, and made candles.

Corona returned to school to get an A.A. degree in paralegal studies and administration of justice. She got a job in security at a big, high-tech company. "Money was everywhere," Corona said. "Even the cafeteria looked like a plush restaurant. I got spoiled."

Then she started feeling sick, the work got too hard, and she transferred to an easier job. She grew weaker, suffered chest pains, and had a heart attack. She was 49 years old.

Her name is Cameo Littlejohn but she prefers to be called Corona. She was born in Chicago, and grew up in Berkeley in the 1960s. She went to Longfellow School, Willard, Berkeley High, and Merritt College. She recalls many lively neighborhood activities and the organizing of the Black Panthers. Corona left Berkeley for a time and studied dance under some of the great names — Katherine Dunham, Alvin Ailey and Ruth Beckford — and for a time was part of a dance troupe that performed all over the country.

She tried going back to work after her heart attack, but relapsed. Too much time off, too much lost pay and "that's all it took. I had a beautiful home in the Oakland hills." Three months later she was homeless. That was a year ago.

She tries to put a positive face on things, and talks about what she has learned about people and about herself since she has been on the street. Corona had always been aware of homeless people, but she thought of them as idlers or hustlers. Now she says, "Even if it is a hustle for some people, that's their hustle. The judgment is gone; I used to judge."

Corona describes the shock of suddenly becoming homeless. "I cried many a night," she says. "I thought 'Why, why me? I didn't do anything. I must have done something, what did I do? What did I do to deserve this, what did I do to have this brought upon me?'

"And I didn't do anything. That's the real thing. I didn't do anything. Life has ups and downs and this was a time I had to realize that. It's not about being down, it's about getting the help, and asking for help. That's the hardest thing! My pride..."

Corona now has a meager income from SSI, but it's just about impossible to find affordable housing, especially housing that would accommodate her and her three small dogs. And for Corona, as for many homeless people who have pets, these animals are very important to her. Not only do they offer unconditional love and companionship, but they provide protection.

She and the dogs live in a small camper truck which she has to try to park where she won't be hassled by predators or by police. "There's a lot of craziness that goes on there," she observes. "I've seen some crazy things. I'm happy that I have dogs — there's a lot of guys out there that prey on single women in cars."

Corona describes an encounter she had at the Berkeley Marina, where she stayed for several months until the police ran her out. "One time there was a strange guy in a vehicle that pulled up next to me and he kept staring in my truck." He left when she drove over to the Marina police station and gave them a description and the number of his license plates; but the police did nothing. The man returned a half hour later and this time she confronted him. He made a lame excuse and left and he went back once more to the police.

Again they did nothing but tell her that she couldn't stay there overnight. When she asked if they were more concerned about rules barring overnight sleeping in a vehicle than about her safety, "there was no reaction. So basically, like, I was on my own."

But while the police wouldn't give her any help when she felt she was in danger, they recognize her and her truck and don't hesitate to hassle her. She has been stopped, mostly at night, in Berkeley, El Cerrito, Richmond and San Pablo. "They just don't want you to stop in their city," Corona says. "They give you a little harassment, not telling you up front but telling you move on, please, not in my city."

What do they stop her for? "They'll say your taillight is not working and it is working, or front lights are not working," or some such excuse. She describes one such experience that happened on a holiday. "I was driving through El Cerrito near the DMV," Corona says. "I got stopped by the El Cerrito police. I didn't have my correct tags. I told them, 'Look, I'm homeless. I'm trying to save up the money to get my registration!' And he gave me this whole thing: 'Well madam, you know it's a privilege to drive, not a right. I'm going to tow your vehicle.'

"I said, 'You don't want to do that. I have no place to go.' He said, 'Get all your belongings.' I had to get all of my belongings, plus my dogs, and stay out on the curb while he called a tow truck. They towed my truck. I started crying. I said, 'Can't you see I have nowhere to go.'

"And some lady, I don't know where she came from, she came from out of the blue. She said, 'It looks like you need help. Can I help you?'" The kind stranger took Corona and the dogs to a friend's house. It took two weeks to round up the $300 to get her truck back.

After that, Corona stayed in her truck at Point Isabel in Richmond. It is a beautiful region along the shore which has been established as a dog park, a place where people can bring their dogs and allow them to run free. It was also a place where homeless people who lived in their vehicles established an informal community.

Corona described how the people looked after each other; a few who had RV's with cooking facilities would prepare meals to share with everybody while people chipped in with money or groceries. There were families and single people, old folks and children. And, of course, her dogs were welcome.

The community is no longer at Point Isabel; the friendships formed have dissolved since the people have scattered. The City of Richmond decided that "the vehicles did not beautify the serene park existence. So they had the police come at 3 o'clock in the morning and flash their lights on everyone and put a flyer on their window." Corona recalls that "it had a broom sweeping up trash and the caption said, 'The City of Richmond is cleaning up this area. Vehicles that are camping overnight will be towed. This will be a red zone.' That's what they did, they redzoned the whole area all around."

There were some protests, but the City of Richmond blamed Costco and Chevron, who put the blame back on the city. Corona says sadly, "So they uprooted a whole homeless community where everyone knew each other, took care of each other, watched each other's cars. Uprooted, uprooted." The word is out: Homeless people are not welcome at Point Isabel, but dogs are.

It seems ironic that while a poor person with dogs can't even find a place to live, people who are well-off not only have homes for themselves and their animals, but also enjoy public facilities specially provided — at taxpayers' expense —for their pets to play.

When Women Are Homeless

HERE

by Peter Marin

Remember the long
afternoons when the body
was the world? Perhaps, in heaven,
they will come again.
But not here, where justice
is missing. Not here, where the rain
beats against the windows
in the ambitious city
where no one learns mercy.
Not here, where in the doorways
men huddle in their skins
waiting for ages to pass.
We must be, with our bodies, the
answer to evil. Is there another way?
Touch me. Here and here.
Tease from my flesh
the singing of sad gods.
Let them remind us, again,
of the gardens to come
where we will be free.

A HEROINE

by Claire J. Baker

A bag lady is heroic because…
she knows so much, feels so much,
rises above so much.

Though she may miss much,
she stays colorfully casual,
compliant as needed,
defiant as needed,
Candid, Earthy, Organized —
a CEO, of sorts…

She travels light.
Enlightened, doesn't need to
promote one damn phony thing.

(based on "Bag Lady," a painting by Arnold White, in the February 2002 *Street Spirit*)

Women on the Street

by Claire J. Baker

Somehow I've escaped being raped!
My athletic build, squared shoulders?
A no-nonsense stride while walking
to my truck, door key clutched?
My natural way of looking around,
heeding each gut-level suspicion?
(Ah, maybe my senior years are
enough to thwart wicked arousal?)

Were I homeless (O God) I'd soon
be raped/assaulted/traumatized
unless at night I never slept,
kept moving on,
wearing out sidewalks,
walking to save my soul.

Filming the Suffering and Beauty of Life on the Street

Story and photo by Lydia Gans



Claire Burch (in center, with camera) and Chelsea, Cobra and Bones, the subjects of her film, "Behind the Bandbox."

Claire Burch has devoted herself to bringing to the world a picture of the suffering, as well as the beauty, of the people society would prefer to ignore. She is constantly out in the streets, recording, listening, encouraging, supporting, being available to people with a story to tell, a problem to deal with, a shoulder to cry on.

Claire Burch moved to Berkeley from New York in 1978 and soon got deeply involved in her new community, with a special interest in portraying the counterculture and the intense experiences of homeless people. For the last 22 years she has been videotaping life on the Avenue (Telegraph Avenue), and in the Park (People's Park), filming the people, the celebrations, the memorials, the events and life stories that are unique to this place.

By now, Burch has thousands of hours of Berkeley's living history on tape, organized and more or less catalogued, material that can be turned into movies and books on subjects as diverse as human experience can be. She has written books and produced films, but there is much more in her archives than could be developed by one person in one lifetime. Her latest documentary-style film, "Behind the Bandbox," screened recently at Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley.

"Behind the Bandbox" documents the lives of Chelsea, her son Cobra, and her on-again off-again boyfriend Bones over the last ten years. When Burch first met them ten years ago, Cobra was 13 years old and had been battling brain cancer and suffering frequent seizures; he had already been through a number of surgeries.

Chelsea's husband had just been killed and, Burch said, "They were in terrible shape." They were on the street, selling their drawings, and Burch was attracted by the quality of their art work. Bones was also on the street, playing guitar and singing his own songs. Bones and Chelsea had both experienced abuse as children.

At first, they were just three among the many people Burch was documenting, but her relationship with them became more intense. "They started bringing me their art, their writing, this and that," Burch said, "and I got more and more involved to the point that it was almost daily, in the heavy melodrama of their lives."

It was not only their artistic talents that attracted Burch but also their daily struggle to survive tremendous setbacks. Over the years, Chelsea's son Cobra has been in 11 group homes and psychiatric units.

That particularly touched Burch because she had seen a young person she loved struggle with mental illness, being labeled and stigmatized, then ultimately turning to drugs, and dying of an overdose. Burch recalls the young woman saying of the drugs that took her life: "It's the only thing that makes me feel normal."

Seeing these kinds of things happen over and over again to people she cares about and tries to get help for, and watching the system failing them, motivates Burch to document their stories.

"Each time it's the social service resources that ain't there," Burch said. "They get their grants, but somehow, between administration and I don't know what, the things they're supposed to provide — hotel vouchers in emergencies — all those things don't happen. Over and over I called, and I taped phone calls of people who were very sick, either physically or mentally. It's raining outside; they're making phone calls to all these organizations that I had a list of, and they make the calls at the middle of the month and the organization said, 'We'll have vouchers at the beginning of the month.' And then I'd have them taping the calls at the first of the month and for some reason there ain't no vouchers. And so on.

"I've amassed an enormous amount of material that proves that whatever there needs to be to help people who used to be in state [psychiatric] hospitals for big chunks of their lives and are now out, they are not getting the help that was promised when they closed those big hospitals. Every day I'd shoot a couple of hours with somebody, and list it and date it and put it in some fashion that is coherent."

Some of that material has gone into her books and films, but it needs to be much more widely seen to spur a movement toward a more compassionate society.

Burch describes some of the meanness that street people encounter. For two years Chelsea and Cobra and a couple of others were sleeping in the bushes behind Willard School in Berkeley. They never bothered anyone and kept the area clean. They would see the neighbors sneak out at night and dump their garbage in the school dumpsters (punishable by a $200 fine). Burch started a project she called "Eyes of the Street," giving Cobra and Chelsea disposable cameras to photograph the neighbors' transgressions.

This infuriated the neighbors who, being homeowners and consequently having clout, called the police to disperse the campers. There was a fine irony to this when, to prevent any homeless people from sleeping there, the City cut away all the ivy and shrubbery which had sheltered them. That greenery had also provided a nesting place for all sorts of rodents and other little critters which then moved into the neighbors' yards and houses.

Burch is an artist as well as a filmmaker. The walls of the home she shares with Mark Weiman, her partner of almost 30 years, are decorated with her paintings and drawings and collages — that is, the wall space that is left above the acres of shelves holding her thousands of videos.

It is the same artistic talent that she recognizes in so many of the street people she has gotten to know. And on another level, she can identify with their need to live freely, since she herself was pushed as a child to be a high achiever and live a conventional life.

But Burch recognizes that a great many of the very talented people she knows are also very troubled, with various psychiatric disorders, and desperately need help — help which they are not getting. While she herself grew up in a loving, caring family, she constantly hears the stories of misery and abuse people have suffered.

The name of the film, "Behind the Bandbox," recalls an old expression used to describe something or somebody that looked shiny and new and picture-perfect, by saying they looked as though they had "just come out of the bandbox." When Chelsea was a child, people used to comment to her parents, "Your children look like they just came out of a bandbox."

The reality was that she was forced to remain silent about the horror that her family life really was. The title, "Behind the Bandbox," is "a metaphor for being brought up in a family where there were secrets, unpleasant secrets and hypocrisy," explained Burch. Chelsea's childhood experiences are brought out in the film; and at the end, Burch gives the number to reach a child abuse hot line.

Claire Burch has devoted herself to trying to bring to the world a picture of the suffering, as well as the beauty, of the people society would prefer to ignore. She is constantly out in the streets, recording, listening, encouraging, supporting, being available to people with a story to tell, a problem to deal with, a shoulder to cry on.

She says about herself, "You know, I'm not really a social activist. I will present it as much as I can, but these are individual stories. I don't take part in political things because I can't. I'm just giving an ear and a face to anybody on the street who has something they want to say."

Hers is a much needed voice. Would that more people would listen. Burch's real-life stories show the worth and deep value of individuals who suffer abuse and poverty, yet are still vibrant, loving, creative human beings that society should not cast off into some heartless institution.



A sign of the times at Charles Schwab

Reminding us of those poor souls who sold pencils and apples during the Great Depression, an artist stands outside Charles Schwab's firm in San Francisco, holding a box of apples for sale for 35 cents.

Above him, the flashing sign shows that the NASDAQ is falling once again. Selling apples outside a stock firm might be depressing to investors, but it speaks volumes about the times.

Lydia Gans photo

A Religious Calling to Fight for the Rights of the Poor

An Interview with Sister Bernie Galvin

by Eric Robertson

If there is such a thing as an easy path for a nun, Sister Bernie Galvin didn't take it. She forged her own way. As a leader in campaigns for economic and social justice, she has often cut an unpopular course through the woods of America's beloved capitalism to shine a light on the true causes of poverty and homelessness. In the past 30 years she has organized sugar cane workers in the fields and mills of Louisiana, textile workers in Virginia and the Carolinas, and nursing home, mental hospital and health care workers in the Bay Area and the South.

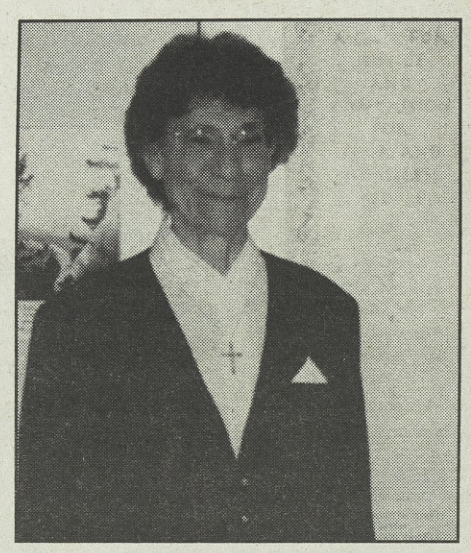
In 1993, Galvin founded Religious Witness with Homeless People to unite leaders of all faiths to advocate for the rights of homeless people. She is a scrappy and tenacious fighter for the underdog who challenges the policy puppets who so often fail to reflect on their stance. Her tough looks combine with a gentle, yet passionately compassionate, southern voice that falls somewhere between Sissy Spacek's Coal Miner's Daughter and Sally Field's Norma Rae. Born in Missouri and raised in Oklahoma, she began her career with 17 years of teaching in junior high schools.

Sister Bernie has been a thorn in the mayoral sides of Frank Jordan and Willie Brown, marching through the marbled corridors of San Francisco City Hall, leading camp-outs on the front steps, and placing tombstones for the dead homeless in the grass of Civic Center Plaza.

In 1999, Sister Bernie began a national campaign through Religious Witness to organize a coalition of some 400 prominent religious leaders in 48 states to promote federal funding of affordable housing. A large U.S. map hanging in her office, like a general's war room, is filled with colored stick pins showing the campaign's progress. Then-HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo wrote a letter of commendation for Sister Bernie's efforts.

She has been honored twice as a Local Hero by the *Bay Guardian* and received a Saints Alive Award from the Metropolitan Community Church along with an American Jewish Congress Mensches in the Trenches Award and a Regional Pax Christi Peace Award.

I spoke with Sister Bernie a week after her hard-fought defeat in campaigning against Proposition N on the November 5th ballot. Supervisor Gavin Newsom designed Prop N to take away nearly all of a homeless person's General Assistance grant, leaving only $59 a month for the poorest San Franciscans.



Sister Bernie Galvin, director of Religious Witness with Homeless People.



Sister Bernie Galvin leads an interfaith protest for affordable housing for the poor.

"What was glaringly absent in this whole scenario, was that there was no united voice of the faith community speaking out against this attack on poor people. So that was my calling. Something had to be done about this to unite the religious voice." — Sister Bernie Galvin

Eric Robertson: *Up until 1993, you were mostly working as a labor organizer. What made you change from this work to working on behalf of homeless people?*

Sister Bernie Galvin: Life is about following one's heart. That is how my life has always been. I burned out in 1989 and came out here to Berkeley to the Graduate Theological Union on a two-year sabbatical. I just freelanced for two years. It was so great. I slept. I prayed. I spent time by the water and in the woods.

I had a second-floor apartment on Shattuck Avenue on the corner of Shattuck and Virginia. Every morning at five o'clock I would hear this shopping cart going down the street and I would get up and just sit there and wonder how this could happen in a wealthy country like ours. I wondered about the suffering of the people. I began to go out to People's Park and just sit there to be present with homeless people. That experience, that awareness of the plight of the poorest people in our communities, planted the seed in my heart to work with homeless people.

Then Local 250 Health Care Workers Union asked if I would do organizing for them. I thought, why not? This job put me right in the middle of the Tenderloin with homeless people around all day, you know, on the streets, in and out of the buildings, and that kind of finished the tugging at my heart. So I quit working with the union and didn't know what I was going to do. I had no idea. I began just walking the streets. This was September, 1993. I just listened to homeless people, talked to people like Father Louis Vitale and others who had been working with poverty for a long time.

One month before that, in August of 1993, (former San Francisco) Mayor Jordan unleashed that Matrix program and there were hundreds and hundreds of people, more than a thousand a month, being cited or arrested for so-called "quality of life" violations. And what was immediately apparent to me, what was glaringly absent in this whole scenario, was that there was no united voice of the faith community speaking out against this attack on poor people. So that was my calling. Something had to be done about this to unite the religious voice.

So I visited five or six religious leaders and said, "Would you come to a meeting?" At the first meeting I had 25 religious leaders. We called another meeting. After that we had 40. We drafted a statement and got 125 signatures or so [on it] in no time. We planned an action and went down to City Hall unannounced. We put out a press release, went in, got on the steps, made our declaration, and walked up to Mayor Jordan's office and had a demonstration there, and then demanded a meeting with him. So that was the beginning and we called ourselves Religious Witness with Homeless People.

Eric: *Was your declaration in opposition to the arrests and ticketing?*

Sr. Bernie: It was remembering the mandate of all religious faiths that we are called to stand with poor people and that we cannot be silent when poor people are under attack. We must speak out. And we did so through our actions. That was nine years ago and we are still doing it now.

Eric: *Did you find when you that there were churches that did not want to be a part of Religious Witness?*

Sr. Bernie: Yes, there are some of the churches that have more conservative members, and the religious leaders of those churches would not be involved in it.

Eric: *Did they ever give you a reason why they did not want to be involved?*

Sr. Bernie: It was pretty obvious. There is so much discrimination and scapegoating of poor and homeless people as the cause of the problems of our society. That attitude seemed to be reflected more in the wealthier and more conservative churches — but not exclusively.

Eric: *Why do you think some people believe that homeless and poor people are the cause of our problems in society?*

Sr. Bernie: Well, I think that when a problem becomes so prevalent in a community, people look for someone to blame it on, as opposed to recognizing that all of us are responsible for the problems in society. In our city, the people look at the decrease in the tourist industry and they blame the poor people for that. Poor people get blamed for the poor economy. They get blamed for the dirty streets without any reflection as to why people are having to live on the streets in the first place. If there is any blame, and it certainly belongs to all of us, we should look at our local government as well as the state and federal for not providing affordable housing, which is the basic cause of homelessness.

San Francisco has, over the last 10 or 20 years, been very negligent in producing affordable housing. It cannot all be blamed on the decrease in federal housing dollars or state housing dollars, although that is a major problem. This city, even when it had $113 million just two years ago, even with all the advocacy from poor people and homeless to use that money for affordable housing, it was put away for a rainy day. None of that budget surplus was given over to affordable housing.

In the *Chronicle*, Brown was quoted as saying, "We've tripled the size of the general fund reserve and now have more funds set aside for a rainy day than at any other time in the city's history." This is at a time when we had over a hundred people dying every year on our streets. It is as if homeless people are invisible when it comes to meeting the needs of the city. It was like a denial that any of this general fund should be used for poor people.

Eric: *Do you think that relates to the idea that homeless people aren't San Franciscans, that they are from somewhere else?*

Sr. Bernie: Well, I reject that magnet theory. New York says that. Every major city says that: Chicago, Atlanta, Portland, Seattle. If you look at the problems of this city, even over the past five years, at the gentrification of the neighborhoods because of the dot-com industry coming in, at the skyrocketing rental rates, at unjust and illegal evictions, at people having to leave the city because they couldn't afford it, at people who suffer from catastrophic illnesses — thousands of people became homeless just in the last few years. These were San Franciscans. There has never been a study done to prove people come to San Francisco because we are so kind here with our welfare.

And I don't think we can say we are kind to homeless people after nine years of chasing them from one end of the city to the other. Out of the Civic Center, into U.N. Plaza, out of U.N. Plaza to Embarcadero, out of Embarcadero and the business district into Golden Gate Park, out of Golden Gate Park into neighborhoods — constantly, constantly chasing people. That is not being kind and good to poor people. After over 136,000 citations or arrests of poor people under the so-called quality of life violations, it is very difficult to believe that anybody would think we are so good to homeless people in San Francisco.

They are still being chased from place to place. You see how the Civic Center is so cleansed — meaning it's cleansed of homeless people. In U.N. Plaza, in order to force homeless people not to sit there and rest, they cut the benches down one night. In the dark night they went in and took the benches out.

Eric: *Those sitting blocks on Market Street were also taken out years ago.*

Sr. Bernie: And Hallidae Plaza. They took benches out of there. But that is not the solution to homelessness — to chase people around. Obviously it's not, because we have more people homeless than we ever had. The city refuses to look at the causes of homelessness which is the lack of affordable housing.

Eric: *Willie Brown and others have said that the homeless problem cannot be solved. A lot of people feel like this.*

Sr. Bernie: That is why it hasn't been solved. It's because they don't have the political will, the political courage to do it; and so they say, well it's too big, we can't do it. They don't want to do it. They don't want to expend money, to expend our city funds, on poor people. They simply want to get rid of poor people. Proof of that is the nine years of chasing them around, hoping they will leave. Have you heard about Amos Brown talking about putting homeless people in one of the big ships out on the bay somewhere and calling it the ship of hope? That is an example of getting them out of sight, out of mind. He said they can have all the services right there for them; it will be convenient for them. Over my dead body!

See **Sister Bernie Galvin** *page nine*



Religious Witness with Homeless People placed gravestones at S.F. City Hall in memory of homeless people who died.

To Acknowledge

by Helena Kyriakou

You give with such apprehension
Petty pennies, nickels and dimes
Yet withhold civility, humanity
Embarrassed by your "altruism"
Embarrassed that your friends might see
Your aim is for the cup yet it tumbles
Loose change now scatters, hits the floor
Your wandering gaze did not meet theirs
Lacking clarity to see properly
Those who you intend to benefit
Yet acknowledgement is what they yearn for
More paramount than random bits of change
A brief conversation, a friendly handshake
Simple words can reverberate in hollow hearts
Like random change that rattles in empty cups

So Still

by Helena Kyriakou

Lonely souls in winter do not move
Hibernation conserves energy for days of hunger
That of the soul and of the stomach

Sister Bernie Galvin

from page eight

Eric: *What do you think it is that makes people see homeless people as different from themselves?*

Sr. Bernie: Principally it is the media's constant portrayal of poor people as people who are responsible for their own demise. Especially the *Chronicle* and Channel 4.

Eric: *Why aren't people responsible for their own state of homelessness?*

Sr. Bernie: Well because of the factors that I just mentioned. There is a total crisis and lack of affordable housing. There is inadequate health care. There is inadequate mental health. There is condemnation of people because of substance abuse. That is not the cause of homelessness, but is sometimes the result of it. The answer to what we see is not to take people's money. It is not to blame them.

There is very little rubbing shoulders with homeless people because they are always kept pushed away and isolated. There has been a fear instilled in the brains of the citizens, in the residents of this community, about homeless people.

People are constantly given the impression that homeless people are criminals when they see the police picking them up here, chasing them there. People think, I don't want my children around them. I don't want to be around them. So people never get to know homeless people or hear the stories of why they became homeless. But even without that, it should be evident why more and more people are homeless. Everybody is aware of skyrocketing rental rates and all those factors. But there is not the connect. I think it's almost a conspiracy that there not be a connection about what's going on and the causes of homelessness. And the actual human beings that are the victims of all of that.

Eric: *What would you say to those who think that if the poor can't make it in San Francisco, they should go somewhere else?*

Sr. Bernie: It is an easy attitude to adopt when we want to shirk our moral responsibility as elected officials or as members of this community to take care of our brothers and sisters. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. We are all mandated to take care of poor people, to stand with poor people when they are attacked.

All of what we see today coming from Supervisor Newsom, all of this approval of Prop N by 59 percent of the people, stems out of the attitude built up over the past ten years by the media, by the portrayal of homeless people as being criminals, by the portrayal of people all being addicts and drunks. People are frustrated. We are all frustrated. Nobody's more frustrated than the homeless people themselves. San Franciscans have been accused of succumbing to compassion fatigue but I don't believe that. I believe all of us want a solution, but that the majority of the people want those solutions to be humane. I am totally convinced of that.

So here comes Supervisor Newsom who wants to run for mayor, who plays on fear and who plays on people's genuine concern that there be solutions to homelessness. Newsom, realizing that, says this is a compassionate solution. Then he spends up to a million dollars convincing the people through slick ads, radio, TV, newspaper, billboards, literature coming into our homes, his own voice calling into our homes saying Prop N is compassionate. He won by selling an egregious piece of legislation. Prop N is not a solution because the proven solutions to homelessness are housing, treatment, health care, living-wage jobs. All N would do is take people's money with no guarantees. Prop N's definition of housing includes a mat on the floor of a shelter.

Eric: *Do people have a legitimate concern with the so-called quality of life violations and aggressive panhandling?*

Sr. Bernie: Yeah. People don't want urine and feces on the streets. Nobody does. Neither do the poor people who don't have toilets out there. Yes, it's disgusting, and people are tired of it. That's part of the frustration. People are fearful this is ruining our economy. It's not the poor people ruining the economy. It's the economy putting poor people on the streets.

Eric: *Is there a cost to having a compassionate solution to problems like this?*

Sr. Bernie: The cost is more than money. The cost to our elected officials is courage and will to do what we already know works. We know what works, but we'd rather put our money away for a rainy day than to put it on what we already know works. We know that mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, affordable housing work. It's been proven over and over and over. It's proven here in our city but not to an adequate degree.

Eric: *When was it proven here?*

Sr. Bernie: It's proven all the time through programs of the service providers, Catholic Charities and St. Anthony's and Glide and the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Health. They have programs that are effective. There just aren't enough of them, and there is not money allocated by the supervisors or Willie Brown to provide more.

Eric: *It's funny that you say those are effective programs because many people have it in their mind that they are not. Whenever you say social services, people think of a bureaucracy that's not working.*

Sr. Bernie: There is that. Not so much in the nonprofits I think, but in the city services. There is that, but there are also good programs that work. So they are not all bad. There is a lot of bureaucracy, a lot of money wasted on George Smith. What, $150,000 a year just for him as coordinator of the mayor's office on homelessness? Plus four or five aides in there for $80,000 a year or something. That's pure waste. That is ridiculous. It is outrageous.

Eric: *What do you think most homeless people did with their $350 a month from General Assistance [until Prop N took nearly all of that away]?*

Sr. Bernie: One of the main things people are doing with their money is getting off the streets for part of the month. They pool their money and rent an SRO. They rent a room from a friend. People buy medicine because none of the GA recipients have health coverage; none of them do. And probably most of them have health problems. They buy personal articles. In the case of some, they use cell phones in applying for jobs because there is no way they can get a job with only a shelter number.

Some of them have been using it on drugs. They have an addiction. To take the money away from them is not the solution. To provide treatment is the solution. Medical professional organizations have said it over and over and over again, that taking the money is not the solution. We shouldn't blame them for the problem; we should try to meet the needs. Every day you have between 1,000 and 1,400 people waiting in line for treatment. The people are begging for help and we are not giving it to them.

Eric: *What's the difference between giving a person money and deducting that money from their GA check and using it to fund shelters or housing?*

Sr. Bernie: It simply lacks the respect for the dignity of the person. The dignity of that person to make their own decisions about how they will use the money. Who is to say that this city with all of our waste of money and our warped priorities can handle that little $350 a month better than the individual persons? I bet they can't. And furthermore, there is no guarantee that housing is going to happen.

Eric: *What is it that you consider a human right?*

Sr. Bernie: A human right is a God-given right. A human right is a sacred right. Every human being has a right to that which is necessary for their survival at least. And necessary for survival is food and clothing and decent housing. Those are sacred rights.

Eric: *Are they being violated right now?*

Sr. Bernie: Well, absolutely. It is violated across this whole nation by our federal government which has so decreased the federal housing dollars that it throws the states and cities into this housing crisis. So yes, the rights of poor people are being violated at every level, every day. Millions of poor people in our country are having their basic human rights, their sacred rights violated.

Eric: *What makes you keep doing this activism when it is such an uphill battle?*

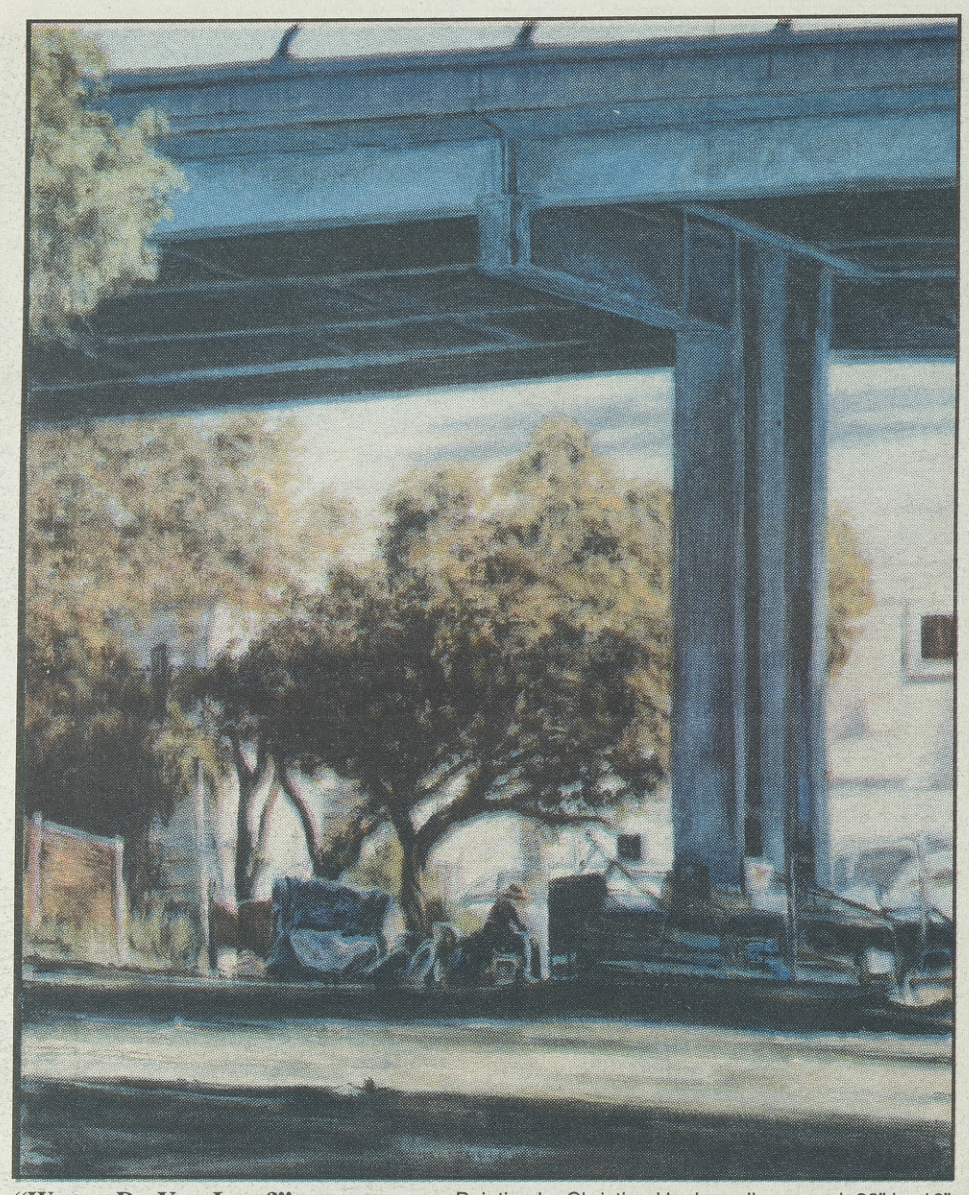
Sr: Bernie: It is simply amazing I never lose hope. I never lose hope. I get angry at things like Supervisor Newsom using homeless people for political gain. A lot of people do that. You know, I get angry at that but I never lose hope. One source of hope all my life have been the people with whom I've worked. The poor sugarcane field workers and mill workers. How they never lose hope is inspiring to me. The mill workers who suffered such severe cumulative trauma disorder — the tendonitis, the bursitis from a thousand times a day the same movement — I mean I am so inspired by poor people.

When I was on sabbatical I used to go sit in People's Park. It had rained and there were mud puddles everywhere all over. I was just sitting there and there was an old man sitting about from here to that wall [about 15 feet]. He got up and walked over. He was dirty, ragged and had huge, gnarled hands, filthy hands. He reached over and he cradled in his hands between his fingers there, a little purple flower that was growing out of a little hump around those puddles. And he leaned over and he cradled that and he looked at it for a long time.

And you think, how steely strong is the human spirit that can recognize and cherish and love and gently cradle a little, tiny, tiny piece of beauty in the midst of the mud and the dirt and the suffering of his life. And yet this human being did that. There is something in the human spirit that just won't die. It won't die. And that is what I see in poor people. I see it and it keeps my heart alive.

Eric: *How do we show people that side of poor people — their humanity?*

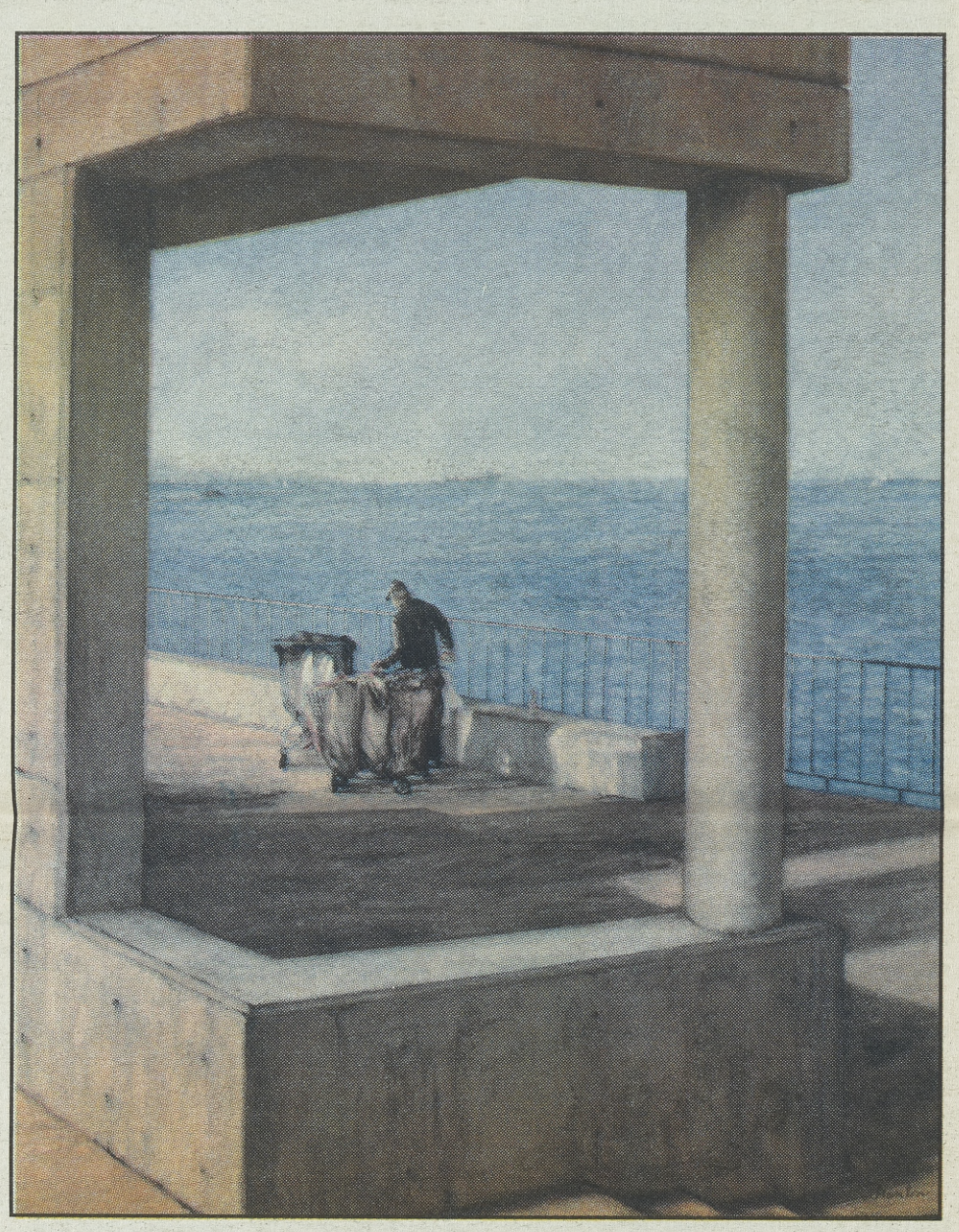
Sr. Bernie: We follow the mandate of our religions and our faiths to stand with poor people no matter what and to fight for protection of their dignity, to fight with them and for them. And when we stand there honoring their dignity by our very presence and being on their side, that has got to make people wonder. So I think it is through our own response to living our faith. It is living our faith that has got to make people wonder.



"WHERE DO YOU LIVE?" Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on panel, 20" by 16"



"HOMELESS IN KYOTO II." Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on panel, 5" by 8.1"



"WATERFRONT VIEW." Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on canvas, 26 3/4" by 21"

Art with a Social Conscience

Street Spirit Interviews Christine Hanlon

from page one

Hanlon's body of work is both an indictment of an unjust society and a symbolic act of restoring the humanity of people who have been discarded by an economic system that has no use for the poor. Her paintings break the silence of a society that tries to cast homeless people into oblivion, and neglect them to death.

Fittingly, it was Richard List, a formerly homeless artist, who brought Hanlon's paintings to the attention of *Street Spirit*. List, the well-known originator of Plop Art, has been a roving art correspondent for *Street Spirit*, constantly finding vital new art with an unerring eye.

List has undergone long bouts of homelessness, and is sensitive to the misrepresentation of homeless people by artists. It is all the more significant, then, to hear how greatly he values Hanlon's artwork.

List said, "There's a great deal of gravity in her work and there's more there than meets the eye. I looked at her work and asked myself, 'Why does she do it?' I think she wants to focus our attention and then perhaps we'll have more compassion. After looking at her art, I did start having more compassion, and I extended it beyond homeless people to other people as well. And it makes my life better.

"I truly believe she's got a tremendous intellect which is informed by her good heart; and the two together make an incredibly potent combination. I hope she gets the MacArthur genius award someday."

Hanlon's paintings have been chosen for exhibition in many regional and national juried shows; and she has received first-place awards in several museum shows. At the Berkeley Art Center, 500 artists submitted over 2,000 slides to a national juried show; Hanlon's art was one of only 40 pieces chosen.

While working on her Master of Fine Arts at the Academy of Art College, she received several faculty awards. Hanlon now teaches at the Academy of Art College and gives technical seminars at colleges and universities in the Bay Area.

Street Spirit: *Why does your art focus on images of homelessness, poverty, urban isolation, especially in a culture that wants to ignore homeless people?*

Christine Hanlon: Good question, and you've actually included the answer to the question in your question, which is: I specifically chose that subject to get people to look at the subject of homelessness. I also have been a social activist and a political activist for many years, but I had never included that imagery in my work. I would say I was more of a traditional landscape, figurative artist.

But when I decided to go back to graduate school after 20 years, I realized that, in order to create a body of work that had deeper meaning for me, I had to bring more of what was really important for me into the painting. So I was going to school in San Francisco, and I became keenly aware of all the homeless issues because I was just seeing people on the streets; and I decided that, as an imagery that would have a strong impact on people, and as a social issue that I could comment on, I decided to choose homelessness. I really didn't choose it based on the salability of the images that I was going to create.

Spirit: *You weren't concerned about whether you could sell these paintings?*

Christine: In terms of the commercial viability of the imagery, I began to feel I didn't care.

Spirit: *It almost seems like a death sentence for a serious artist to focus on homelessness. People don't want to see it in real life. Why would they want to see it in paintings?*

Christine: Exactly. So that actually again points to the answer. In just the way Richard List once took a picture frame, went into a museum, and stood behind the frame with himself as the subject, I knew that it is much easier for people to look at the image of something than the real thing, and especially issues of poverty, homelessness. All that is easier to deal with when it's removed from the actual subject. So, my intention was to create images that were beautiful, in the sense that they would pull people in. But when they were pulled in, they would realize they were looking at a homeless image.

When I first showed the pieces in 1995, the feedback I got from people was that they are disturbing because it's a homeless figure. At the same time, I didn't want it to be in your face — people on the street that are overly disturbing to people. That's why I made the figure just an element within the whole context of an urban environment, because I want it to be a strong place to which people have to visually move, and then they discover what it is.

Spirit: *That's exactly what happened to me in looking at your painting, "Rhonda's Place." When I first looked, I saw the lights of the downtown, and I thought Rhonda's Place must be a late-night café or a place to hear music. Then, as the painting draws you in, you see what Rhonda's Place is: It's a homeless woman in a sidewalk encampment, barely surviving through a bad night in the big city.*

Christine: Well, "Rhonda's Place" was one of the images where I basically wanted to comment on the social class element to homelessness. Actually, what's in the background is one of those super-long limousines, and then the Sheraton Palace Hotel. Anyone who knows that area of the city knows where that is. I was definitely making a comment — you know, you got that. It could be a café or something, but actually it's her encampment. And then I wanted to show extreme poverty, someone living right on the street.

Spirit: *Living on the sidewalk right next to extreme wealth.*

Christine: Right. Right around the corner from extreme opulence. One of the most expensive hotels in the city is right around the corner. And this is true everywhere in the world, that the highest-end financial districts and the fanciest hotels are always right next to the people in the most poverty. It happens everywhere. I was trying to make that comment.

I know Rhonda, and that's why I called it "Rhonda's Place." I fed her for about a year when I was in graduate school. I had my school studio right around the opposite corner when I was at the Academy of Art. I used to come out and see her there, and I would bring her food. My partner and I would routinely give her money and food, because that's where she's living, and she's still living there. She has seen the image. I gave her a copy of the painting, and she knew I was doing a painting of her, and she was fine with it. She is a pretty amazing woman, actually, that she has been alone on that street, or the next street over. She is there five years later.

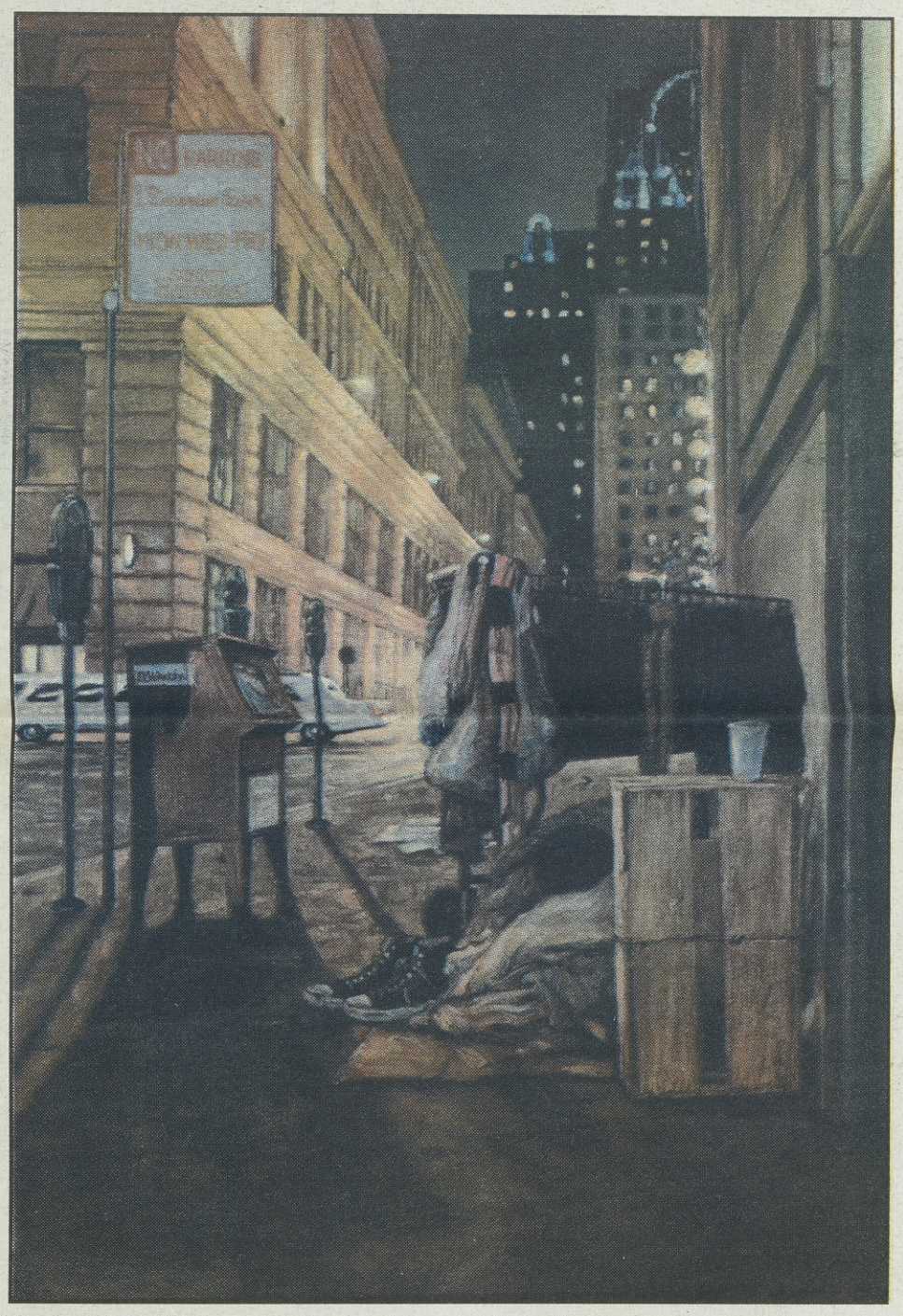
See **Christine Hanlon Interview** *page 11*



"SERENITY BASE." A homeless person camps under a tree, seemingly exiled a long way from his native San Francisco. Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on canvas, 50" by 150"



"HOME ON WHEELS." Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on panel, 20" by 32 1/3"



"RHONDA'S PLACE." Painting by Christine Hanlon, oil on canvas, 29 1/8" by 18"

Street Spirit Interviews Christine Hanlon

"Rhonda's Place" is an image where I wanted to comment on the social class element to homelessness. I wanted to show extreme poverty, someone living right on the street, right around the corner from extreme opulence. One of the most expensive hotels in the city is right around the corner.

from page 10

Spirit: *Your paintings show great empathy towards homeless people, yet you went beyond that by giving her food, too.*

Christine: I would be a social activist full time if I didn't have to make a living. I've always been into volunteering and activism.

Spirit: *What issues have you worked on as an activist?*

Christine: Anti-nuclear. I worked really hard against the Gulf War in 1991. I organized. I marched at that anti-war rally on Saturday, October 26th [the huge rally in San Francisco against war in Iraq]. It's just so strange. It's like déjà vu ten years later. I've always been an activist. I was involved with the Shadow project. I have worked actively on electoral issues.

Spirit: *What was the Shadow project?*

Christine: It was sort of a performance art piece done by groups of people all over. We got up in the middle of the night before Hiroshima Day, and made full-body outlines in white on the street with people that day, and this happened all over the world. When people woke up that morning, they saw on the street these white outlines shaped like people's bodies. So, it was an anti-nuclear action, commemorating the people at Ground Zero in Hiroshima who were vapoirzed, but left a real shadow on the ground.

Spirit: *Reviewers have written that you paint images of urban isolation, akin to the painter Edward Hopper. One review noted that your painting, "Waiting for the Go," showed a man immobilized at a street corner, separate from everyone else. But the reviewer didn't mention that the man was holding a sign asking for alms. How strange that the review missed that man's real isolation and destitution, the same way that man is isolated in real life from the cars driving by that ignore him.*

Christine: Well, that image was the second homeless painting I did, and I was definitely influenced by Edward Hopper. I looked at a lot of Hopper. He did a lot of bird's eye view, but also worm's eye view perspectives. He painted figures in urban environments. I was a little disturbed that the reviewer thought that was a man reading a newspaper, but the reviewer got it right that the figure in another painting was a homeless man. But, once a review is written, and someone reacts to your work, you can't change what's been published. That's it.

Spirit: *It's illuminating, though, that here is this image of urban isolation, but the review itself contributes to that isolation by not recognizing this is a man in poverty asking for help.*

Christine: Yeah, I saw the irony of that myself. I thought it was sort of interesting. To me, it was utterly apparent that this was a man holding a cardboard sign with a cigarette in his hand, just waiting. I mean, "Waiting For The Go" is the title. What's he waiting for? He's waiting for the cars to move, and then they'll stop, and then he can ask for help. It's about your awareness of people.

Once you become aware of something, you're always aware of it; but, you can't expect everyone else to have the same awareness of an issue all the time that you may personally have, although you assume that people will. Now, when those paintings are all in a group, and it's nothing but urban scenes with homeless figures, then nobody's going to mistake what it is.

Spirit: *Are Edward Hopper's lonely images much of an influence on your art?*

Christine: I would have to say that I have looked at lots of Edward Hopper; and I've seen how he uses perspective, and the selection of just one or two figures within his compositions. I think he's a better watercolorist and printmaker than painter. Technically, I think there are much better painters with oil paint than Hopper, but compositionally he is fantastic. Great perspective. He is very, very good.

Spirit: *Many artists have portrayed alienation. But only a very few portray the intense form of loneliness and suffering that poverty and oppression breed.*

Christine: Right. Well, I can talk about one of those artists. There are a couple of artists, both contemporary and in the past, that I just feel so passionately about, and one, of course, is the German woman...

Spirit: *Kaethe Kollwitz? Was she an inspiration for you?*

Christine: Yeah, she totally is and was. Oh! I mean her work was so full of intense emotion, and comment on human suffering, basically.

Spirit: *And poverty, war and injustice.*

Christine: And poverty and war, and everything. At the same time, if you look at images she has done, like her self-portraits... To me, it really doesn't matter what subject the great artists are focusing on, it's really their sensitivity. Their sensitivity, period, in the sense that they can turn the view back on themselves like she does in that self-portrait, and still make an emotional statement that just transcends her and time. To me that's one of the greatest self-portraits ever done.

Another artist who is a contemporary artist that I feel really passionate about and who actually inspired the piece, "Serenity Base," is Jerome Witkin. Jerome Witkin is a painter who deals with very intense subjects, from homelessness to torture to domestic violence to the Holocaust; and does these huge triptychs and major-sized pieces that are just unbelievable. He is an unbelievably fantastic

See **Christine Hanlon Interview** *page 18*

Santa Barbara's Oligarchy Passes New Poor Laws

City officials ban vehicle dwellers and step up enforcement of anti-homeless measures

by Clu Carradine

Happy Holidays! Those of you earning less than $50,000 per year: get out. Yes, just in time for the holidays, it's now officially illegal to be poor in public in Santa Barbara, California. Bah, humbug.

If you happen to be one of the unfortunate Santa Barbarans whose job doesn't pay enough for you to rent an $1100-per-month studio (no utilities, but the cockroaches and gang activity are included) in the bar zone (last count: 27 bars in a six-block radius), and have dared to try and adapt by living within your means and buying a motorhome to use as housing — well, guess what? You're outta here!

Despite the strongly worded recommendations to the contrary made by a Task Force empaneled by the Santa Barbara City Council, the council voted (with one nay and one abstain) to cleanse this not-so-fair city of its poorest residents.

It is now illegal to park a trailer, motorhome or RV on city streets in Santa Barbara between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. at night, or for more than two consecutive hours during the day. RVs and oversized vehicles are also banned from parking in waterfront lots, except for 23 specially striped spaces; those 23 RVs and all others are not allowed to park from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. in any waterfront lots.

Marty Blum, the mayor of Santa Barbara, was seen barely containing her joy at the passage of this new law; on the 11:00 news that night, she smirked at the camera and said, "Well, we don't want these people here, bottom line."

A photo appearing in the following day's *Santa Barbara News Press* showed a haughty Blum and a sneering Councilmember Dan Secord looking down their noses at a gray-haired female speaker pleading with the council to not pass the anti-homeless ordinance. It was a bird's-eye view of what anyone who dares defy the oligarchic dictatorship called Santa Barbara government sees, and a chilling visual image of power gone completely mad.

RVs are serving as dwellings for an estimated 400-plus Santa Barbarans because they have been shut completely out of the housing market here. That is reprehensible. Worse are the gleeful attacks on these citizens and subsequent criminalization of their poverty by the "haves," their minions and the local government.

"Please, sir, I want some more," said young Oliver Twist in Dickens' depiction of widespread hunger, poverty and homelessness in 19th century England. Times haven't changed all that much.

The little guys in our socioeconomic food chain can't make ends meet and can no longer afford the astronomical rents being charged in Santa Barbara. The little guy buys an old motorhome and this becomes his home. He works, he pays his bills on time and he minds his own business. He maintains his local roots and family ties.

Some of these vehicle dwellers are non-custodial parents of minor children who need to stay near their kids and participate in their lives. Others are retired locals. Some are disabled, others are not. The RV community is just that, a community. No better, no worse, no different than any other neighborhood of diverse population.

The little guy, probably born here, finds himself being referred to as a "transient" by the "haves" and the local governing bodies and police. It's easier to attack something that is different; and if you begin by assigning these people a term indicating they are not from around here and not really human, then the first step towards ultimate liquidation is much more easily taken. Never mind that the term "transient" is derogatory and completely inaccurate in most cases; it stuck and became as acceptable as racial slurs are in certain circles. The objective is purely to devalue human beings and make their eventual eradication easier to achieve.

The little guy is forced to work for a pittance, and shut out of housing in favor of developer greed, tourists' demands and the desires of the rich to live in a lily-white and restricted town. He is told to move elsewhere. "We can't afford to house you transients in our town. Not everyone who wants to live here can afford to do so. Get out."

And this is accepted, even encouraged in Santa Barbara. And now, it's the law. The metamorphosis is complete: the city of Santa Barbara has become an exclusive Country Club, private and for the use of its carefully selected members and their support staff only — and the support staff just barely. If you are mowing a member's lawn, caring for his kids, driving his aged mother or cleaning his house, you'd better stay out of sight and never let on that you are sleeping in your RV or are one of three people living in a room at the Faulding Hotel. If you out yourself, you will lose your job and be pointed straight to Bakersfield. Don't ask, don't tell.

Additionally, Mayor Blum has stated the following: "Thirty-five percent of the crime committed in Santa Barbara is by people with no addresses." She does not state the nature of these alleged crimes; for example, it is illegal to occupy a motorhome for the purpose of habitation (SBMC 15.16.080), jaywalk, or any number of other crimes described and outlawed by the city parental units. It is illegal to play a stereo too loudly, use a gasoline-powered leaf-blower, to double park, etc. There are many illegal things in Santa Barbara; for example, one cannot park a car on the street with a "For Sale" sign in its window: hardly a violent crime, but definitely illegal here.

Mayor Blum does not state the nature of the crimes, nor does she elaborate on what exactly she means by "no address." Tourists have no address. People who live in rural areas in this county such as Los Alamos have no street address and use a PO Box exclusively for all their mail delivery. Blum is like all politicians in that she makes a blanket statement with no evidence or sources to back it up.

Politicians gamble and thrive on not being held to the fire and made to produce sources or evidence; they just throw everything in the slop bucket at the nearest wall and hope something sticks. The public buys it all, hook, line and sinker, because some politician said it was so.

The systematic slander against the poor in this city has grown increasingly blatant. Emboldened by past and continuing successes, the "haves," the police and the government here have stepped up their crackdowns and enforcement measures designed to rid Santa Barbara of its residents who are unable to keep up with the spiraling costs of living. Increasingly repressive ordinances are created to squash all forms of independence.

The city bills itself as "compassionate" and states its goal is to "transition these people into programs," when to begin with, "these people" don't need to be "transitioned" *anywhere*. What they need is to be left alone to survive quietly in their own town and make their own decisions as law-abiding, peaceful Americans living within their means, modestly, yes, but successfully.

The critical situation facing low-income residents is entirely due to a Master Plan gone mad, and malignant redevelopment of functional neighborhoods where working-class people once lived. All the downtown SRO hotels save two are gone, replaced by upscale tourist hotels. Small, modest cottages around town are remodeled and the rents jacked up. It's harder to rent here than it is to buy in most places; the requirements and application process is daunting at best, and the monthly rents in Santa Barbara equal a down payment in many areas.

Further, the market here has been propped up long enough by these laws and socioeconomic cleansing measures. While our latter-day Marie Antoinette of a mayor smirks at the news cameras and gleefully spouts her modern-day version of "Let them eat cake!", while her various Madames DeFarges sit knitting in time with the heads of the poor rolling in the councilchambers' aisles, the developers and "haves" get fatter. Meanwhile, an increasing majority tries to do even more with even less.

The market is not allowed to seek its true level. Yes, we have housing here, and a lot of it; it just costs far more than it's truly worth and our citizens are forced to seek shelter wherever they can, and are then criminalized for that act of daring independence from the "haves" and the system. It is considered an act of defiance in Santa Barbara to survive the socioeconomic cleansing measures enacted by the rich and powerful. And that act is now a crime.

The Santa Barbara City Council also recently decided to make life impossible for those who drive pedicabs for a living; these entrepreneurs are now to be forced to submit to detailed FBI background checks, obtain driver's licenses, and pay for insurance and a city business license, among other restrictions. Pedicab operators are now also required to have a set schedule of fees for service, in order that they may be more easily taxed, tracked and regulated. Until now, pedicab operators accepted only voluntary donations.

The city saw a cash cow in the pedicab industry and wanted in on the deal, period. This city never allows small-scale entrepreneurship to go unpunished for long, and once the city radar starts beeping, the ordinance committee and City Council swing into action swiftly with a vengeful efficiency. The city gets its pound of flesh, and the daring entrepreneur, thoroughly chastened and reminded of his/her place in Santa Barbara society's food chain, is shaken by the neck and put back on the minimum-wage treadmill. The attempted escape from the system is effectively thwarted and the public safety

See **Santa Barbara Oligarchy** *page 13*



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

Housing here costs far more than it's truly worth and our citizens are forced to seek shelter wherever they can, and are then criminalized for that act. It is considered an act of defiance in Santa Barbara to survive the socioeconomic cleansing measures enacted by the rich and powerful.

Oligarchy

1: *government by the few*
2: *a government in which a small group exercises control especially for corrupt and selfish purposes; also: a group exercising such control*
3: *an organization under oligarchic control*

Santa Barbara's RV Laws Lack Compassion

The Santa Barbara City Council, with its majority of self-avowed liberals, had no problem voting against violence in Iraq. How can it, then, so easily do violence to the city's poor? Perhaps it is because so few citizens speak up for them.

by Peter Marin

The Santa Barbara City Council voted on November 12 to pass restrictive new laws pertaining to recreation vehicles and those who live in them. As we all know, rents have risen to the point where many in Santa Barbara cannot afford them. This is especially true of the elderly, the disabled and others on small, fixed incomes. These are often the people who live in vehicles.

I work with the Committee for Social Justice. One of our tasks is to represent in court those who dwell in vehicles. Most of our clients are decent, struggling men and women — often with children — who once had housing and now do not. Many can't work for a living. If they are disabled, they get $650-$800 per month. Some get by on less. As a last resort, many have scraped together enough money to buy the vehicles in which they sleep. They park these on city streets, having nowhere else to go.

The city has laws against such solutions. But our committee has challenged these laws by defending RV dwellers in court. We have been successful in all but a very few cases. Most importantly, we have begun to win with the necessity defense: the argument that people without viable alternatives cannot be found guilty of breaking such laws.

In response, the city staff, led, it seems, by the city attorney, has drafted new laws to force RV dwellers off the streets. The new laws forbid the parking of RVs on any city street for more than two hours during the day; and, worse, they entirely prohibit the parking of such vehicles on any street for any length of time from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m.

The new laws, of course, will apply to all Santa Barbarans with such vehicles, as well as to tourists who bring them to town, something few people yet realize.



THE PROTEST MARCH Art by Osha Neumann

But their most obvious impact, and intent, will be to disenfranchise the poor who have no other homes.

They will be ticketed for these new offenses, and these tickets must first be laboriously appealed to the Police Department, which does not, as a rule, reverse itself. Only then can the ticket be brought into court, under circumstances that will make the necessity defense far less likely to succeed. But that is apparently the city's aim: to bypass the judicial processes already in place, and to make justice harder to come by.

More than two years ago the Committee for Social Justice approached the city, and the county as well, with plans for extensive off-street RV parking, but no substantial steps have been taken to provide it.

In the near future, sites will be available for perhaps a few dozen vehicles. But there are hundreds of vehicle dwellers. And what are the others to do? Stay in motion? Not sleep? Get endlessly ticketed? Leave town?

When the City of Santa Barbara formed a citizens' task force to study this issue it made two main recommendations:

- Create adequate legal parking.
- Make no new enforcement laws unless adequate parking is available.

We always hear how important it is to vote, but this is not what citizenship is about. It is about preventing injustice and promoting generosity of spirit and the insistence on equality. It is about outrage and protest.

Why has the council ignored these recommendations? They have, they say, been "pressured" by local groups of merchants, developers, hotel-operators and well-to-do homeowners. In the eyes of these groups, RV dwellers are nuisances and bad for business, and they spoil views and the pretty myths we sell to tourists. The answer? Outlaw them.

It is no surprise that many such groups arrive at this conclusion. What is surprising is that the Santa Barbara City Council, with its majority of self-avowed liberals, has embraced it. This council had no problem, after all, voting against violence in Iraq. How can it, then, so easily do violence to the city's poor? Perhaps it is because so few citizens speak up for them.

We always hear how important it is to vote, but this is not what citizenship is about. It is about preventing injustice and promoting generosity of spirit and the insistence on equality. It is about outrage and protest.

All those who find the new laws unjust should call (805) 564-5318, or write or e-mail Mayor Marty Blum and the Santa Barbara City Council. Speak out. Save the poor from the City Council and the council members from themselves.

Peter Marin is a member for the Committee for Social Justice in Santa Barbara.

Santa Barbara's Oligarchy

from page 12

guaranteed. All is well in Babylon.

It is not legal to be an entrepreneur in Santa Barbara unless one happens to be a rich entrepreneur or a celebrity. In Santa Barbara, the little guy must toil endlessly to further fatten the big guy. Big guy doles out a few crumbs in the form of minimum wage or just above, keeps little guy captive and running in endless circles on the economic exercise wheel at part-time so he never quite qualifies for any benefits or health insurance. Big guy gets fatter. Little guy is kept too exhausted to even think of trying to escape the wheel.

To "fill in the gaps," the social services with their high-income CEOs riding the poverty pimp train burst on the scene to "aid the poor." Shelters spring up out of nowhere. Grant-grabbing gravy gatherers appear on the scene to run the shelters and dole out the goodies. Private groups who try to offer assistance are quickly run out of town. There is money in the business of poverty and homelessness, a lot of money. Keeping the warm body count high and the grants circulating among the chosen few is crucial to the survival of these service distributors.

Meanwhile, little guy decides to try and find his own food without big guy's permission. Worst of all, the little guy isn't giving the big guy his cut. Big guy "cracks down" and forces the uppity little guy right back to the minimum-wage, dead-end treadmill and lifetime captivity, enriching big guy yet further. Of course, the justification here is "keeping us all safe from ourselves." Those pedicab drivers are a pox on our quality of life, as are those RV residents. Both must be stopped.

There is not much difference between this scenario and the gangster-era extortion rackets, and ultimately, both involve someone, somewhere, with a gun. Then it was an enforcer; now it's a cop coming to take the offender to jail for violating the ordinance. All these people have a great deal invested in seeing the population thoroughly declawed; that way resistance is futile and it's easy to subjugate any strays who may attempt to fight back.

Allowing the little guy to escape to run freely in the economic fields unfettered is too risky to the big fat guy's survival. The big secret here is that the big guy is no longer able to survive without the little guy's lifetime of toil. The big guy is completely dependent on the little guy in a sick symbiosis of his own making, and has everything invested in making sure the little fellow never gets out of captivity and discovers this truth. The big guy needs the little guy far more than the reverse; in order for him to keep eating, the little guy has to be paying the bill.

We don't need more laws propping up the real estate market, the wealthy, or the social services system. We don't need more laws destroying the American entrepreneurial spirit our ancestors sacrificed everything to ensure we would have the right to exercise. We need to let the market seek its true level, leave people alone, and move forward to a more sane and humane and truly functional way of life.

Yes, it will be messy, uncomfortable and our social structure will be shaken to its core. However, mess and discomfort are a part of birth, and it is time for Santa Barbara to be reborn as a socially and economically healthy city where people go to work each day and go home to a real dwelling at night.

Step one is for the government to stand aside and get out of the business of regulating where people are allowed to live. The law of supply and demand has always worked well; we have the supply here to meet the demand, just pick up a newspaper and look at all the vacancies. Then look at what they cost. Landlords know they can charge that much and people will be forced to pay or get out; it's a captive audience. If people have a legal choice, realistic prices will inevitably follow.

We also need to fire the dictators sitting on the Santa Barbara Politburo. Santa Barbara badly needs to clean house, and we have plenty of skilled workers here who are qualified and will gladly do the job with great pleasure.

This is America, not a private country club, and the sooner we stand up together and declare this in a forceful manner, the better off this city will be for everyone who lives here.

Clu Carradine is a founding mother of Santa Barbara Homes On Wheels.

Food Is a Human Right

from page five

people: access to land, a job that pays a living wage, or social programs to ensure they have enough to eat. But unless a government recognizes the right of its citizens to food and responds by ensuring living wages, or social safety nets, poverty will increase and hunger with it.

Neither federal nor state governments appear responsive to the poor. A tax cut of $1.6 trillion, allegedly designed to benefit high-income Americans, may be made permanent by President Bush as a staggering 3,372 million pounds of food per year is needed to feed the hungry in America, whose numbers have increased by 1 million since 2001.

Legislators and the Bush Administration are receiving increased scrutiny over charges of pro-business bias and allowing private business to become more powerful legislators than the governments of sovereign countries. NAFTA is proving a contentious issue among human rights groups internationally and in the United States.

Jeffrey Sachs, a highly respected authority on development, suggested sending teams of UN development inspectors to the United States, where they would find a "nearly total disconnect between global commitments and domestic policies." Sachs argues that the $100 billion the Iraqi war is expected to cost would be enough to avert about 30 million premature deaths from disease. An estimated 170 million children in poor countries are underweight, mainly for lack of food, causing mental or physical damage to 50 million, according to the World Hunger Education Service.

"Hungry people are angry people," Mittal said. "Change has to come when they get angry enough. Human rights are never just given to you. You have to work for them and we've just started."

Meanwhile, at CityTeam Ministries in Oakland, a few dozen remain after the meal to find sleep on plastic-covered bed mats. Resting their heads on a donated pillow and rough woolen blanket, they are tired after a long day waging their own war against poverty.

The Gypsy Tree

A True-Life Christmas Story

by Toni Cook a.k.a. Cinnamon

It was nearing Halloween in Peoples' Park, 1989. Kevin was off with his fancy new girlfriend in Piedmont. I still held camp in the northeast corner of the Park. It was lonely. Someone, probably Stephen, had found some Halloween decorations and dropped them at the camp.

There was a small pine tree near our camp. I decided it would be our Halloween Tree. With the help of the people around me, we decorated that tree. When asked what we were up to, I just said it was a happy Halloween Tree. Made sense to me at the time.

Everyone who mattered liked the idea. As the days passed, more trinkets were added to our tree. Strangers would come by and hang an object or two. Of course, anything in Peoples' Park which is attractive will attract the attention of the police.

"What have we here?" Officer Smith asked, sarcastically. I knew the SOB from my days as a "lady of the evening." Those days were long gone. He never took advantage, although there were plenty of cops who did. Not with me, but I did hear stories. Smith surprised me. He said that he was impressed by the cleanliness that we maintained at our camp. By the way, he said, he might have a surprise for us.

Sure enough, a few days later, he stopped a carload of juveniles not far from the Park. He took a case of beer and two bottles of hard liquor and let them go with a warning. The next thing I knew, I got a gift from the police. Patrol car pulled up and made my day. What they confiscated, they gave me. So it is true that not all cops are bad.

Still, most of the time, it is a struggle to stay on the good side of the law. They have their orders, as I have been told many times. Some times, those orders are frightening. I once heard a senior officer say (off the record) that their policy was to make life as difficult as possible so that everyone would move out of Peoples' Park. Guess what!

We stayed.

October faded into November. We acquired new decorations for our tree. While still being a Halloween Tree, it became a Thanksgiving Tree. Next to the pumpkins and witches were turkeys and Pilgrims. I am always very thankful for my good friends and my pets.



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

The University of California cops took notice of our Thanksgiving Tree. One said we should take it down. Yeah, right.

November turned to December and Christmas was upon us. We all know what kind of tree it became. The word had spread that there was a Christmas Tree in the Park. It needed decorations. We got decorations.

One girl who had known my late husband, Gypsy, had made a little ornament that was a pure image of him. We hung it from the top-most branch. It was beautiful. I was happy.

The UC cops came by again, warning that the decorations had to come down. This is Christmas. Didn't they have anything better to do than bust a Christmas tree?

The holiday meal at Newman Hall was wonderful. The gifts, provided by real citizens, were well-received. Sleeping bags, gloves, and the one thing you always need on the street — socks!

My happiness was short-lived. While we were eating, the gardening crew came and stripped the tree of its finery. As I looked up at the barren, sad tree, I saw a glimmer in the sun. It was Gypsy. That ornament had survived.

Two years later, it was still up there.

Where to Eat When You're on the Street

St. Andrew's Free Lunch in Oakland

St. Andrew's Soup Kitchen



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

Review by Maureen Hartmann

Conventional wisdom declares, "There's no such thing as a free lunch." Yet I had two tasty, nourishing and gratis lunches this past month, as a guest of St. Andrew's Soup Kitchen, at 3220 San Pablo Avenue in Oakland.

Individual donors fund St. Andrew's Soup Kitchen. Volunteers come from the church and nearby community. St. Andrew's serves lunch from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday. Shirley, the head chef, who has been with the food operation for about 14 years, came from a background of cooking for restaurants and other food service businesses.

After a very brief wait in line, I found, on the dining room tables, neat place settings with a knife and fork and napkin, and a paper plate and cup at each. The entrée consisted of bite-size pieces of beef over rice, steamed baby carrots, and a cucumber salad with Italian dressing. For dessert, there was an individual-sized apple pie and generous slice of white cake with vanilla frosting on the top and sides and lemon frosting between the layers.

During my first visit to St. Andrew's, I interviewed two guests, Wendell and John Johnson. Wendell comes twice a week and has been coming about a month. He says, "The food is fine and the service is okay. I'm from the South. We don't waste any food. Whatever's put on the table, I eat.... It means a lot to see that someone cares (enough) to fix a meal for someone."

John Johnson, the second guest, has been "coming for quite a few years, at least eight or nine." He's been coming "mostly every day.... The food and the service is simply fine. As long as I've been coming here I've never seen any kind of incident, such as fighting over food. You can get seconds if you want it."

At the second serving I visited as a guest, the lunch consisted of soul food: golden sweet potatoes and greens with bright pink pieces of ham, fluffy rice with bite-sized pork pieces on top, a generous slice of bread, and a lemon tart. There was a cup of Hawaiian punch at each place and big plastic pitchers full of water in case people needed seconds of a beverage.

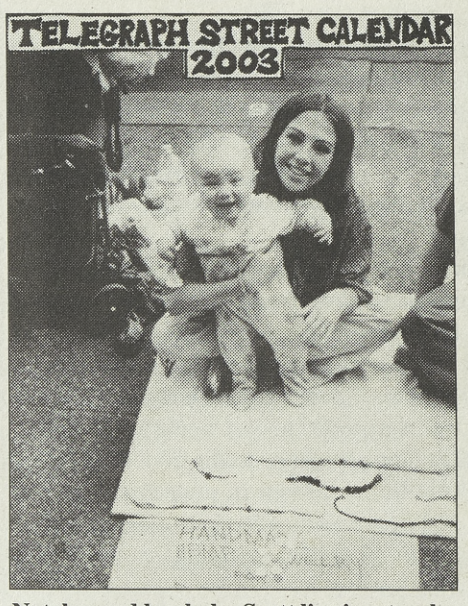
After lunch, I noticed the fresco on the outside of the dining room which could be viewed up close by those waiting in line. On one end of the wall were the words of Jesus, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat," in English and Spanish. On the other end was a painting in bright colors of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In the middle were faces, Latino, African-American, and white, surrounding a table set with trays and silverware.

Paul O'Neill, the first guest I interviewed, said of the food and service, "The service is good and the food is good. It's nutritious. It's soul food with greens all the time and sweet potatoes like today. It's not steak, but it's pork or hotdogs — ethnic black people food. I especially like the greens. Shirley is a good cook. Her cooking is known from miles around."

Another guest, Franklin Reid, said he comes a couple of times a week. He finds the food and services "very well, thank you." His favorite foods are "meat and potatoes," and "greens like they used to make them back home where I come from, in Washington, D.C. It's called soul food."

The "free lunches" were very tasty and nourishing, and my fellow guests added human interest to the experience.

Telegraph Street Calendar 2003



Natalya and her baby Scott live in a truck.



B.N. Duncan offers for sale copies of the *Telegraph Street Calendar*.

B.N. Duncan has just published the *Telegraph Street Calendar 2003,* a fascinating, richly illustrated profile of the zany and wildly creative rebel spirits in Berkeley. This 14th edition of the calendar was photographed, written and designed by B.N. Duncan, one of the most knowledgeable chroniclers of the utterly unique street scene on Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue.

The *Telegraph Street Calendar* is available by mail for $12 from: Twisted Image, P.O. Box 12642, Berkeley, CA 94712 (checks payable to Twisted Image). The calendar is also sold at Cody's Books, Inkstone, Amoeba Music, Dave's Tobacco and News Store, and Tower Records in the South Campus Telegraph area; at Black Oaks Books in North Berkeley, at Comic Relief on University Ave., or from B.N. Duncan's vendor's stand in front of Cody's Books at Telegraph and Haste.

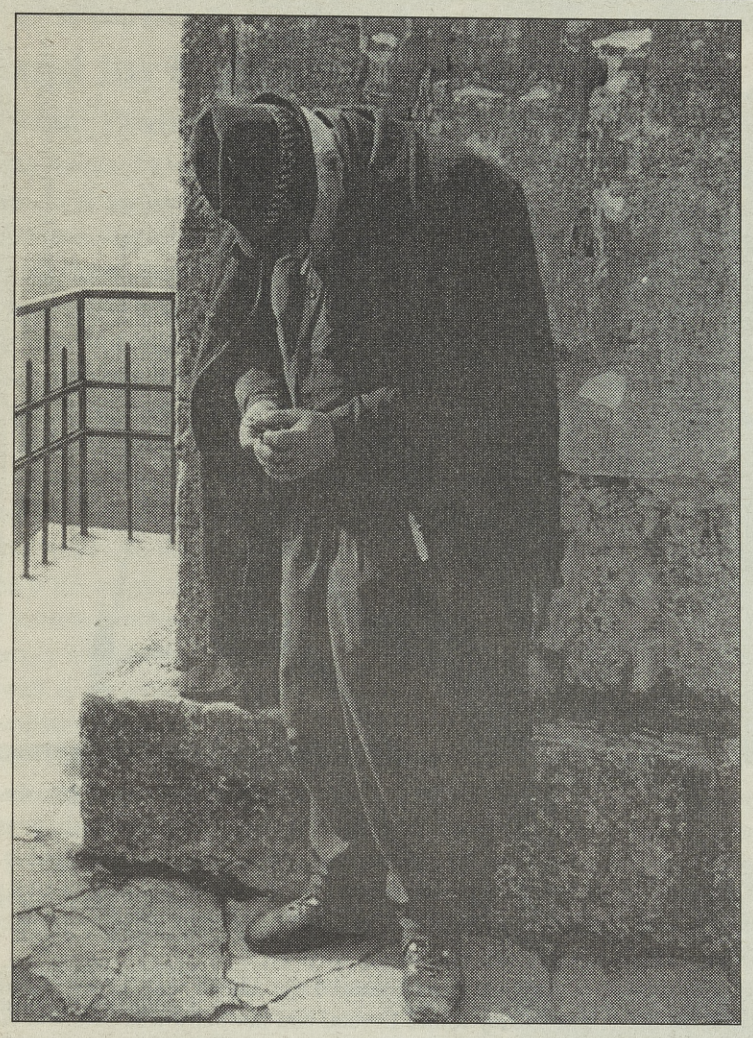
Natalie's Thanksgiving

by Michael Creedon

She was hanging around
the fires on this guilty
street, looking to
get some warmth to
her frozen feet.
Quickly the fire
of broken twigs
burned out into
the icy concrete.

It was almost
Thanksgiving
and she had
that one knocked.
She would eat with
all the homeless
off an empty plate.

She poked the
dying fire
for one last
bit of warmth.
Then Natalie
disappeared
like the blue geese
flying north.



ALAMEDA COUNTY INTERFAITH MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

Tuesday, December 10
12 p.m.-1 p.m.

1221 Oak Street, Oakland
County Administrative Building

Join us as we gather to remember our sisters and brothers who died homeless and to speak with and for those whose lives are at risk because we, as a society, refuse to acknowledge that housing is a human right.

For more information, contact Cindy Preston-Pile at St. Mary's Center, (510) 893-4723 x209

The Alameda County-Wide Interfaith Memorial Service for Homeless People will be held at the County Administrative Building in Oakland on Tuesday, December 10, at noon to mourn the deaths of those who have died homeless or those whose deaths have been hastened due to a previous encounter with homelessness. We choose this site because, currently, Alameda County has no system in place to count the number of homeless deaths within the county. Gov. Davis recently vetoed Senate Bill 1751 which would have established a state-mandated count of homeless deaths.

We gather, as well, to pray and sing, to speak and act with and for our sisters and brothers whose lives are at risk because their basic human rights are being violated. We, as a society, refuse to make the provision of truly affordable housing a priority. Estimates years ago were that nine to twelve thousand people are homeless in Alameda County; a homeless count is planned in January. Others — working families, seniors, men and women with college degrees — stand at the brink of homelessness because their monthly income is too low to allow them to continue living here. The minimum rent for a one-bedroom apartment is $800-$1,000 a month, an amount that is far beyond the reach of many.

In the days following the Memorial Service we will continue our public witness. Various organizations will hold one-hour vigils, from 12 p.m.-1 p.m. at Oakland City Hall. We invite you to either join in one of these vigils or to hold your own gathering in the city where you reside.

We plan this memorial service with homeless people as our country prepares for war, a war that will disproportionately affect those who are already extremely impoverished. Let us continue to pray and work together for justice and peace in our local communities and our world.

Shoved Away
by Claire J. Baker

Huddled in front of a fancy
perfumery, a homeless family
and their hungry dog
exude odor of dust
and vinegar.

They are shoved away
leaving a greater stench
of inhumanity.

"Behind Every Great Fortune Is a Crime"
by Claire J. Baker

While 90% of Americans are fortunate,
10% are made to be petty criminals,
outcasts, undesirables. We're not
talking leprosy, but human beings
with good fortune rusting,
the ship that never docked
sinking in treacherous waters
off Atlantis.

Is it a crime not to be rich?
Is it a crime to fall into chasms?
A crime that brain synapses misfire,
shock one into depression?
Shouldn't workplaces be made safe
and places to work more available?
One gets ill, disabled, beaten up,
goofy from this crazed government.
Is intuition, too, a crime?

"Build thee more stately mansions,
O my soul,"
wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes.
The emphasis here is on SOUL.
Let it be.

A spin-off on Jim Hightower's article, "Behind Every Great Fortune Is a Crime," *Street Spirit*, November 2002.

Poor Leonard's Almanack

Quotations and Original Thoughts
by Leonard Roy Frank
Street Spirit December 2002

ON FREEDOM

1. Among a people generally corrupt liberty cannot long exist.
EDMUND BURKE (British statesman, 1729-1797), letter to the sheriffs of Bristol, 3 April 1777

2. I am free when I am functioning here in time and space as the creative will; freedom by our definition is obedience to the law of one's nature.
MARY PARKER FOLLETT (American sociologist, 1868-1933), *The New States — Group Organization, the Solution for Popular Government*, 1918

3. Freedom won through bloodshed or fraud is no freedom.
MOHANDAS K. GANDHI (Indian human rights leader, 1869-1948), in *Young India*, 13 September 1928

4. We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put into it is ours.
DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD (Swedish United Nations secretary general, 1905-1961), *Markings*, 1964

5. Nobody's free until everybody's free.
FANNIE LOU HAMER (American human rights leader, 1917-1977), quoted by Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 1993

6. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it.
LEARNED HAND (American jurist, 1872-1961), "The Spirit of Liberty," *Life*, 3 July 1944

7. Those who begin coercive elimination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters. Compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard.
ROBERT H. JACKSON (American Supreme Court associate justice, 1892-1954), *West Virginia State Board of Education. v. Barnette*, 1943

8. There is a zone of liberty... where the individual can tell the government, "Beyond this line you may not go."
ANTHONY M. KENNEDY (contemporary American Supreme Court associate justice), Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing, December 1987

9. A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance. And a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.
JAMES MADISON (American president, 1751-1836), letter to W. T. Barry, 4 August 1822

10. Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery.
None but ourselves can free our minds.
BOB MARLEY (Jamaican songwriter and singer), "Redemption Song," 1980

11. The saddest epitaph which can be carved in memory of a vanished liberty is that it was lost because its possessors failed to stretch forth a saving hand while yet there was time.
GEORGE SUTHERLAND (American Supreme Court associate justice, 1862-1942), *Associated Press v. National Labor Relations Board*, 1938

12. The individual can never escape the moral burden of his existence. He must choose between obedience to authority and responsibility to himself. Moral decisions are often hard and painful to make. The temptation to delegate this burden to others is therefore ever-present. Yet, as all history teaches us, those who would take from man his moral burdens — be they priests or warlords, politicians or psychiatrists — must also take from him his liberty and hence his very humanity.
THOMAS S. SZASZ (contemporary Hungarian-born American psychiatrist), "Mental Illness Is a Myth," *New York Times Magazine*, 12 June 1966

13. Must the citizen even for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterwards. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right.
HENRY DAVID THOREAU (American philosopher, 1817-1862), "Civil Disobedience," 1849

14. It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them.
MARK TWAIN (American humorist, 1835-1910), *Following the Equator*, 1897

15. Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.
UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, United Nations, preamble, 1948

16. They may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom.
RANDALL WALLACE (contemporary American screenwriter), *Braveheart* (film), 1995

17. Sometimes naked, sometimes mad, now as a sage, now as a fool, thus they appear on earth, the free ones.
ANONYMOUS (HINDU)

18. Freedom lost, all lost.
SAYING

19. My freedom ends where yours begins.
SAYING

20. Caged bird's stomach never empty, / Hungers only to be free.

21. Freedom is the measure of progress.

22. We advance to freedom along a spiral path.

****

Leonard Roy Frank is the editor of *Random House Webster's Quotationary*, a collection of over 20,000 quotations chosen by amazon.com as one of the 10 best reference works for 1999, and *The Random House Webster's Wit & Humor Quotationary*.

A Building Burns in Berkeley

A Berkeley Mystery

by Kevin McFarren



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

I awoke to the sounds of helicopters. I rose groggily and peered out my window. It may well have been the fall of Saigon. Helicopters, smoke, burning embers. At first, the fire did not seem all that close, but the wind was pulling the flames in my direction. Then I realized what was burning. The large apartment building at the end of the street had been vacant since the '89 earthquake. I never thought much about it. It was always just far enough away. Until now.

I knew that some people were camping there. Some were friends. Some were very scary. It is one thing to panhandle on Telegraph to get enough for a forty-ounce to help find a quiet place to sleep. That was David. It is another thing to sell crack in the Taco Bell parking lot, only to smoke up the profits. That was Rico. They were the best of friends. Problems arose when they disagreed as to who was the more righteous substance abuser.

I had crossed paths with both of them. As a disbarred attorney, sometimes employed as a private investigator, I meet some interesting people. These were two of the more interesting. I knew they were staying at the building that was going up in flames, and I was worried.

Like a moth to a flame, I was drawn to the fire. I grabbed some clothes, and headed out. It was far worse than I had expected. I saw burning embers flying by my third-floor windows. Flaming pieces landed on nearby rooftops and started new fires. Firefighters were carrying hoses and chopping holes in those rooftops. The building where the fire started was, as the spokespeople say, "totally engaged."

That building went up like a torch. An old, pre-war, wood-frame structure, it covered most of a city block. I had never seen such an intense fire in an urban setting. I had seen the Oakland Hills fire, but only from a distance. This time I could feel the heat. Some of my neighbors came around. Most knew that some homeless people crashed in the building and may have started the fire. But I knew some of those people and the chance of any survivors was highly unlikely.

I stood there with tears running down my cheeks when someone grabbed my left elbow. I am not a violent person, but I was not going to let some authority figure move me. I am also not small, so I turned with all my force, ready to hit somebody. There was David. "We all got out!" he told me. There was a lump the size of a melon in my throat. I lifted him in the air, squeezed him too hard, and told him I was tempted to throw him into the fire for scaring me so much. How someone, let alone him, could walk out of such a conflagration unscathed was little short of a miracle.

Then I saw Rico. If the fire had something to do with his drug works, I would have a difficult decision as to whether to hurt him really bad or turn him in to the authorities. I could never think of myself as a snitch, but maybe better the system than me.

Meanwhile, David had a problem. "We need a place to stay." Against my better judgment, I told him of a set of garages off MLK Way in Berkeley. If they went in late and left early, they should be safe. Of course, they screwed up. One morning they left too late. Two of the psychotherapists who work in the building found their parking spaces occupied by two prostrate bodies. Being Berkeley, and being shrinks, they handled the situation delicately.

They did not call the police on their cell phones. They parked their expensive German sedans at the curb, and went across the street to buy coffee for their new-found guests. Gently, they woke David and Rico. The guys took the coffee and got the message. Although the shrinks were compassionate, caring professionals, they still needed a place to park their fancy cars. Homeless people were just an inconvenience.

Neither David nor Rico could remember if they had any outstanding warrants, but they were not about to take any chances. Blue uniforms were not what they wanted to wake up to. So they wound up on my doorstep, again.

At first, I was in a dilemma. People who have been on the street usually feel an obligation to help one another. But there is a stronger urge: survival. After years out there, I finally had a nice little place of my own. I could not jeopardize it for two guys I wasn't even sure I could trust.

By then, the smoke had cleared at their old building. I suggested they sneak back in and find some shelter there. They knew the building better than anybody. They easily slipped through the hurricane fence that had been erected immediately after the fire and worked their way in to the structure itself.

I felt comfortable they had some protection from the elements. Then the sky came tumbling down. I thought it was an earthquake. The sound was deafening. The earth shook. I was three blocks away and my windows rattled. The building just fell down. And I had just sent two people into that building. I felt sick.

From across the street, where I had rushed to, I could see the dust settling. Out of the rubble I saw a sight I will never forget: Rico walked out from behind the building carrying the body of a young woman. She was very dead. I thought I had seen it all. I was wrong. David came out from behind the building with an infant in his arms. They were both crying. The woman was dead; the infant was very much alive. David and Rico had gotten out safely. And I had no idea what was going on.

David finally told me, after he had turned the baby over to the EMS crew. They had known her as Crystal. She had been a working girl. They had no idea she had come back after the fire. They had no idea she had a baby. All they heard were the cries — first, the screams of an adult woman, then the sad sobs of an infant.

It did not take a rocket scientist or a medical examiner to tell me the building collapse did not kill this woman. The blow to the head was obvious and was most definitely not caused by falling debris. She had been nowhere near the building when it fell. This was murder.

My first suspect was Rico. I didn't trust him or David. I decided to approach David first. He admitted they had known her, but swore up and down they did not know she was in the building. He was even more vehement that no one knew she had a baby. I believed him.

Now, over the years, I have met more than my share of prostitutes. My dearest friend, Persimmon, made money on her back (and other positions, no doubt). I have flirted with Margo St. James at the Opera House. Prostitutes tend not to take their infant children to work. Something was wrong here.

Another thing bothered me. David said the small room where they found Crystal and her baby was bare. No furniture. Not a mattress; not a rug. I may be a little naive about such things, but it seems to me if a woman is turning tricks, she would want some sort of padding between her and the floor. So I had three questions:

1) Why bring an infant onto the job? Why not simply get a babysitter?

2) Why work in a room with nothing but a hard, bare floor?

3) Who killed Crystal?

I came to some conclusions. Crystal was not working that night. She brought her baby to show to someone. And she died. Violently. Yet the baby was unharmed. I thought if I could determine who the father was, I might have either a lead or a leading suspect. Using every contact I had, I finally found two other working girls who had been close to Crystal. One would not talk. The other, Anna, was shaken, but for enough money, willing to tell me what she knew. I trusted her. She was too scared to lie.

Yes, she knew Crystal had been pregnant. She had been seeing only one guy for awhile. Some prominent politician, married, of course. Rumor was the baby looked just like him. She wanted money. He wanted out. She confronted him at the burned-out building. She wound up dead from severe trauma to the head. Anna didn't know the politician's name. I was closing in, but ultimately it didn't matter. At 11:45 p.m., on a Friday night, a state senator stopped his BMW on the Bay Bridge, got out, and leapt over the side. No body has been recovered.

I sleep better. He sleeps with the fishes.

Heartbreak

by Chris Trian

My heart breaks for my lost humanity.
Slim girls in banks with the faces of lizards
proclaim "survival of the fittest."
A new, cruel, callous morality
creeps under the skin like an army of mites.
I bleed from my hands and eyes
for the part I played
in this immaculate deception.
I too read Nietzsche, Ayn Rand, Godzilla.
I bathed in the blood of the slaughtered lamb
of compassion
and raised high the standard of the strong and brutal.
But nobody is strong anymore.
Atlas is puny and the world rolls off his back.
Monkeys and morons run our world
with superstition and greed.
Our ancestors sleep in the arms
of a more eloquent Morphios
while our children roam the streets
with scarecrow wild eyes
on the medication of the moment.
We are all tricks and pimps and vagabonds,
selling what's left of our smiles
to the highest bidder.
But there aren't many takers for smiles anymore.
Only tight lips and club fists
and minds anesthetized or on steroids.
Television and sports and
cartoons and computer games.
Yesterday I saw a deer walk right down the middle
of my happy little street.
There are raccoons and possums living
in the room where our mother died
and soon they'll rise up
and shoot all the people and I'll shout for joy.
We blew it bad, my misdirected children.
The swastikas have been walking again,
they never stopped.
Exclamation points like billy-clubs
end the death sentence of kindness.
It's every man and every woman for themselves.
There's a bloodbath at the lifeboats
as the ship of state goes down
and the worst part is the bastards
have the audacity to lie straight-faced
and tell us they have the sanction of God.
They bring us sports
as genocide rages
and rage has been genocided.
And our ability to notice ANYTHING
has joined the ranks of the homeless
and the "disappeared."

the wobblies wouldn't stand for it either

by Randy Fingland

all this hootery about the rise & fall
of stocks & bonds, when persistence
has shown slippery paths
present themselves from the unconscious,
or not, leading to power abuse by the bucket,
only once in a while exposed
to the sun since it became an enemy
to human, animal & plant kingdoms
but what the heck, there's always credit
to expand available capabilities, a hedge
to be erected against whatever happens
in the future, so why not gamble lives away
even if the action adversely affects
the jobless rate by tendering
a larger worldwide roofless rate,
as well as the death by curable disease
& collateral damage count,
right reason to spring billions in aid
to rebuild in the image of,
with clear advisement contractua11y
as to who's chief owner in charge
of everything including
the fluidity of process billed
as progress towards
irrational extinction



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

Pain in the Ass

by George Wynn

at the cash register
at Burger King
on Market at Grove
a paleface dude
full of deep concern
and CD tunes
complains of a
black man panhandling
he's not bothering anyone
replies the manager
listen, says CD man
leaning forward
you have to protect the public
the manager ignores him
it's a disgrace
CD man points his finger
at the homeless man
who wraps his arms around himself
lays head on table and weeps

CD man steps away from the counter
with his bag of food
no one gives a damn
about the public
and disappears

homeless man raises his bald head
wipes his tears and smiles

The Anatomy of Thirst

by Lynda Cobden

Is thirst taught or learned?
Can thirst be a lifelong query?
Catalogs proclaim goods.
Seasonal needs build fresh desires. Will people
become thirsty for the item in all colors?
Will yesterday's goods be obsolete already
while some don't even have a place to call home?
When will the thirst end?
How thirsty should we be?

Compassion for the Homeless

by Claire J. Baker

takes us just so far,
then retreats
to catch its breath.

Thank god for candles
burning on altars
real and imagined
all over the world.

Driving to Church

by Claire J. Baker

Wish I had a dollar, Bill, for all
the "askances" cast my way —
a roofed-over female with SENIOR-ity,
not badly dressed, not rich,
not speeding, not bleeding,
just driving to church
in my dented red truck,
hoping for some nativity of the soul —
thankful for the sole on my shoes;

to church to learn how we-the-people
can more gently help rock
cradles of modern civilization.
This is not the Indus Valley
or the Great Rift Valley in Africa.
This is San Francisco vs. Silicon
Valley and Incorporated Greed!

Don't think it will rain today,
yet I feel stormed on inside!
Better readjust my weather vane,
point it away from VANITY,
get out there and do some GOOD!

LONELY

by Julia Vinograd

Sometimes everything is lonely,
bruised with light,
ghosted and hosted with solitude.
The 4 tires on a car
aren't on speaking terms.
The stop and go lights
go blind.
The lampposts slapped with posters
of rock bands and demonstrations
stand like ruined pillars in the desert.
Air itches away from the touch of skin.
3 am and nothing happening
is a dirty secret
and also the secret of the universe
that nobody wants to know.
Sometimes everything is lonely.
The stars looked snubbed.
The moon is unescorted
at the senior prom.
And lonely is not at home at the moment,
but if you leave your name
at the sound of the beep
lonely will call you back
as soon as lonely can.

RAVE

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

So you need to Rave
The Eunuchs' Diuretic of the Corporate Slaves
Rage! Spew it out!
In One Great Gigantic Shout!
When you Rave You are Brave
You no longer are the Slave
You have Power that
Others Fear
When your Rave is — So Unclear!
It just matters that you Rave
Against the Future that you Fear
Rave! The Cathartic of the
Prison-Military-Industrial Corporate Slaves.
It's your Dope — To don't Hope
When your Rave is your Pope
And when your PERSONAL Rage is gone
You'll Submit to Your Masters
Like Callow Fawns
After you Rave...
Purging your anger
Because you've been conned to Slave
And there's nothing you can do
When your Chickens for others have
Come to Roost FOR YOU!
And All you can Do is Just Rave!
The Madman's Escape in the Home of the Slaves!
People are like Computers
Networked Brains and Memory that the
Programmers turn into the Systems' Tutors
They Got a Job for You
And you can't question what they ask you to do
They got a JOB for you
And you can't question what they ask you to do
You're just a subscript of their Program so
It doesn't matter what you feel
Their Income is your survival so
It's just YOUR JOB that is REAL
If you don't like it then RAVE — RAVE!
And Rave some more
While they continue to Program the score!
Cuz' They are Pontius Pilate —
and Jesus is the Poor

A Salmon Day

by Claire J. Baker

When my homeless
friend died
all the upstream salmon
veered sideways, plunged
more back
than forward
before they resumed
the journey.

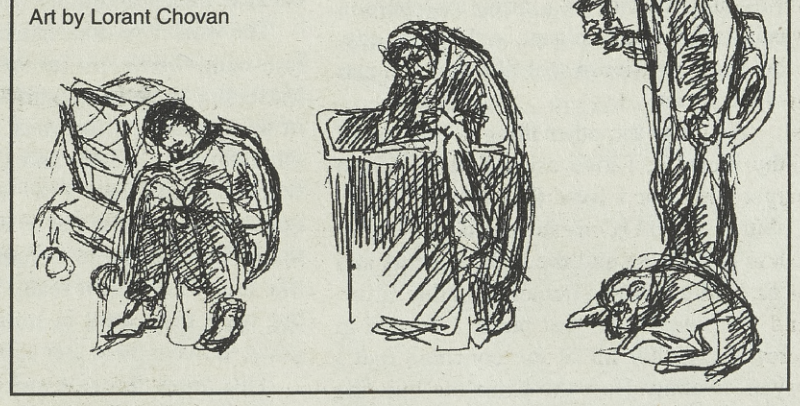
Harpist in the BART Station

by Julia Vinograd

He plays hunched over a small harp
downstairs in the BART station
just before the escalator
going up into sunlight.
He sits on an egg crate,
long black ponytail,
face folded into the music.
He never looks away from his harp
as if the whole BART station
were an empty cathedral
just for the echoing acoustics.
Stained glass faces won't interrupt.
The air slams shut around him
like a locked door.
Only his striped cap out for change
admits the BART crowds pushing by,
tugging packages and yelling children.
High heels tap up the moving stairs,
boots, briefcases, the bones of business,
the flesh of time.
Catfood, kitchen cleanser, cellphones.
The big trains charge past
like roaring bull elephants in heat.
He doesn't hear and his harp mustn't hear.
His fingers protect the music
like a cup of water.
Not to spill a drop.

The Human Condition on the Street

Art by Lorant Chovan



eaten out often

by Randy Fingland

leastwise the lumpy wavy
doesn't make it out
to this busy corner
even though
4 restaurants are situated
behind neon

thing the imagination
to fill
a patron's stomach

but empty
each heart
of compassion

A Homeless Man Speaks

by Claire J. Baker

A phrase comes to him
out of bread crumbs
a shaggy dog
a sip of sunshine:

though the world
shuns/ignores me
though I be ill/ ill-clothed,
yet I sit
in the broad hand
of Buddha and
sometimes I smile.

Interview with Christine Hanlon

from page 11

painter, but he also attacks the most difficult subjects. They are just so beautiful. If you like that piece, you should go see Jerome Witkin's work, and you would be blown away. He's fantastic.

Spirit: *Has anyone else especially inspired you?*

Christine: Of contemporary artists, Jerome Witkin was the strongest influence. I would say, looking back to historical artists, I think Goya, because he dealt with, again, extremely difficult issues of his time, and he experienced them himself. He was anti-war. He dealt with poverty. He dealt with the isolation of the individual. He dealt with a lot of the things that I'm always keenly aware of. It doesn't matter what time you live in.

Goya dealt with insanity and madness. He didn't deal specifically with homelessness, but the people he chose to deal with, the imagery that he really wanted to do, not the commissions that he had to do, but he was expressing his true values about people who were pretty isolated, I mean, in insane asylums. Just really intense, difficult subjects. And then he died in poverty, alone, which is just too ironic.

Spirit: *The ever-popular starving artist effect.*

Christine: The ever-popular starving artist, yes.

Spirit: *At first glance, the painting "Serenity Base" is an almost idyllic look at being homeless — like Huck Finn was homeless, but he was in nature, where it was pretty. You see a man camped under a tree, and it says, "Serenity Base," so you get the idea that maybe it is a kind of meditative place for him and he's peaceful in his little camp in nature. Then you look at the vast landscape leading to a view of the city in the background; and you have an entirely different thought that this person is exiled far away from his own city. He's an outcast. He's looking far away at a city where he doesn't belong anymore.*

Christine: Absolutely. That is part of the interpretation that I wanted people to get from that painting, and there are other layers to the piece. The name "Serenity Base" is actually a little bit of a takeoff on "Tranquility Base," the base on the moon. All that stuff that you just said is added onto the idea that someone can be living in an urban area yet they feel like they are on another planet, a complete outsider. So, that was sort of a tongue-in-cheek way of alluding to a homeless person being on the same planet, in the same city, but they don't even feel like they are part of the society.

Yes. And the other thing is that, in all my imagery, I love using San Francisco just because I love this city, and the source of a lot of my images is that homeless population and the encampments and the reality of being homeless in this city.

So, when I did that piece, I wanted to bring together all of the concerns that I was creating: How the homeless live, the process of being homeless, the idea of time, an expansion of time. Because that's actually the same figure in the encampment, and walking off in the distance. It could be two different people, but one of the things that Jerome Witkin does with his paintings is he uses doubles, because he is a twin; he has a twin brother.

What I was doing was showing the process of being homeless where someone is outside. They are in their encampment where they are living. They are isolated, but they are next to the city, and then they are going towards the city because everybody revolves back to the city for so many services, and it shows the process of being homeless. Then from a sort of an emotional point of view, the city is dark and sort of threatening-looking, because there was all this fog, and the sun was going down, and I wanted it to look like the homeless figure was moving through the light, but towards a darkness.

Spirit: *Towards the darkness he experiences in the city.*

Christine: The darkness of the city, yes. So, there are a lot of different things going on there. It doesn't really matter all the influences that went into that for me. It's more important what your response is to it. Your response is definitely something that I wanted people to feel looking at that painting — the sense of isolation, and outside-ness, dealing with the elements. People are living outside when they are homeless. I loved how you expressed what that painting means; it was really well-expressed, better than how the reviewer expressed it in the *S.F. Weekly.*

The name "Serenity Base" is a little bit of a takeoff on "Tranquility Base," the base on the moon. So, that was sort of a tongue-in-cheek way of alluding to a homeless person being on the same planet, in the same city, but they don't even feel like they are part of the society.

Spirit: *Do you feel painting images of homelessness makes it more difficult to get the public to look at your art, and galleries to exhibit it, and patrons to buy it?*

Christine: That brings up the whole problem of artists making a living in this society. You'll notice that my images now are the urban landscape, but they are not specifically homeless. That's because the gallery that represents me here in San Francisco — specifically, the owner of this gallery, Karen Jenkins — was attracted to "Serenity Base." She's shown it in her gallery and has shown other homeless images, but she can't sell them to her clients, and that's the case for most artists making social comment imagery.

When you have national or international status, you actually have a lot more freedom to create art that is provocative and really socially stigmatic. But until and unless the artist gets to a certain stature of recognition, there is a really small demographic of people who will buy that kind of work. So that's why I am still doing urban images with figurative elements. They are still atmospheric. There is still a sense of isolation. They are very urban in feeling, but they are not homeless figures, because I need to sell my work.

The work I've done has been in a lot of museum shows. A lot of times when artists are in museum shows, there's less of an urgency for the work to be sold; in other words, it's more about public education and people seeing the work. Galleries might want to show the work, but most of their clientele doesn't want to buy stuff like this. They might really like the work, but what they want is something that is going to make them feel good.

This work doesn't make people feel good. It makes them think, and it makes them feel stuff that they might not want to deal with. Although I have sold a lot of the work, it's to specific collectors that want this kind of work, and there is a much smaller percentage of people who want to spend money on this stuff than a painting by Thomas Kinkade that is a nice, nondescript, impressionist painting.

Spirit: *Pictures with pretty lights.*

Christine: But people want that. People want images that are going to make them feel good and take them out of their own reality. So, I know that people don't want to buy stuff like this. But I also know that the work needs to be created; and, in reality, if my gallery could sell this kind of work, I would still be doing strong social comment work. The good news is there is a gallery in L.A. that actually just saw my work, and they love dark work that is making social comment. So that gallery is going to want to find collectors for this stuff. But, at the same time, I feel that my work should be in some public collections. I want people to see the work. I don't just want a private collector to buy it, and then it never gets seen again.

Spirit: *So it's important to you that museums put these images of homelessness before the public.*

Christine: I want the work to be in collections that can be accessed by people. Because when it was at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, a lot of people saw "Serenity Base." And I was ecstatic that it got into that juried show. Actually, the curator of Yerba Buena, who was one of the jurors, liked my work.

Spirit: *In an earlier painting, you won an award for painting images of footwear on benches. "Faux Street Revisited" shows a similar close-up of the feet of passers-by; but in the background, someone is sitting at foot level, partially hidden behind a pole. A human being is sitting on the same sidewalk where all those feet are walking, yet she's living in a different world — left behind and stranded. You used perspective to show the face of a homeless person on the level of everyone else's feet — literally under foot.*

Christine: That is a really complex painting geometrically. It's the square root of five, the ratio; the size of that piece is 37 inches by 84 inches. So, it's a big painting. It's a totally created environment done from about 50 different photos. I posed myself as the homeless person. These are all different people I photographed on the street (*pointing to figures in her painting*). This is a friend of mine wearing my coat with some flowers. This is my hand holding the *Guardian*. This is a homeless guy I photographed in San Rafael pushing a shopping cart. I totally created this environment, but I did that after painting the bench, and the bench painting was called "Faux Street."

Spirit: *I didn't realize the titles were related, but I flashed on their connection.*

Christine: Yes, you got the connection. But the picture in the *Chronicle* saying it was about footwear just made me laugh, because it was not about footwear (*laughing*). It was a competition. Ten students at the Academy of Art were offered park benches. It was sponsored by Park and Rec, Ghirardelli Square, and the Academy of Art, and it was a big publicity thing, and we were to do benches on any theme, and they were going to sit for a month in Ghirardelli Square and get voted on by the public and a panel of gallery judges.

I said, "What can I do that is still going to tie into the homeless theme, but is going to be kind of whimsical and is going to be different?" What I did to get those images of the feet, was I laid down on the sidewalk in front of the building where my studio was, and I asked people if I could photograph their feet as they walked by. So, I actually was down on the ground photographing people's feet from ground level. I got dozens of images, and then I selected the ones I wanted to make the composition.

And the bench actually showed trash on the street, so that when someone sat on the bench, they were sitting in the trash on the street, and what people saw on the back of the bench was a possible view of a homeless person. So, that was the connection. The reaction was so strong, and the people loved it so much, and I got the top prize, and got all this ridiculous publicity. Then after that I said, "Well, I've got to do another painting that expands that view, but it's still going to be from a low point of view."

Spirit: *So in "Faux Street Revisited" we see a little further up peoples' legs, and a homeless person is in their midst.*

Christine: Yes. You're going to see a little more of people. It will still be anonymous, but I didn't want [the homeless figure] to be a guy, and I didn't want to go find women on the street to photograph, so I had my partner photograph me as a person with a can just sitting on the street. It's sort of an androgynous-looking figure, but it's definitely a female; and, when you see the painting, a lot of people recognize that it's me. But it's not a self-portrait. I just posed myself as a homeless person. So, that's how that piece evolved.

Spirit: *How did you come to make the two "Homeless in Kyoto" paintings?*

Christine: That's a fantastic story. A friend of mine who lives in Bolinas is a very famous performance artist, Shasha Higby. I took stills from Shasha's partner's videotape that he did in Kyoto of homeless people when I ran into them at the opening of the Realism show at the Bolinas Museum. They saw that I was doing homeless images, and we got to talking, and I said, "I really want to see the people you photographed in Kyoto because I didn't even realize there were homeless people in Japan."

So, I got this videotape. I went into the lab at the Academy, and I would stop the video at certain points and then take still photographs from the monitor. That's how I created those two pieces. I did it to comment that homelessness is not just here. It's not just in developing countries where there is Third World poverty. It is even in Japan, which we always think of as totally prosperous, and that was back in 1998. It definitely had that response. When people looked at the images, they said, "Japan?"

Spirit: *My first thought in seeing the Kyoto paintings was that this is exactly what homelessness in the U.S. looks like. It was that shock of, "It's over there, too!"*

Christine: It's over there, too. I was trying to make an international comment on the issue of homelessness. Other prosperous countries like Japan, and countries that we don't think of outside the United States, have homeless issues. It's universal, the issue of poverty and homelessness.

Spirit: *In "Home On Wheels," the title sets you up to see a comforting image of home on the streets, at least a vehicular home. But it shows a little guy stranded among huge, grim-looking, faceless buildings with no doors or windows, no way to go inside. His tiny shopping cart is his only home in the whole indifferent city.*

Christine: Right. It was based on a homeless person that I saw at that location which is on Dubose, turns into 13th, under the freeway there in the South of Market area. I didn't get to photograph the person, but I wanted to recreate the situation so I hired a model. Actually, I photographed a shopping cart, but not the person. So, I hired a model to get details of this pose that I saw. I feel like my titles, they're either tongue in cheek, or they're meant to be interpreted several different ways, just like you said. So, it could be, "Oh, that sounds nice!" But, actually it is his home, the shopping cart that he has — everything he has is in the shopping cart.

Spirit: *Yes, everything. And instead of being at home, he is lost in this vast, faceless landscape with no doors to go into.*

See **Christine Hanlon Interview** *page 19*

Interview with Christine Hanlon

from page 18

Christine: Yes. Also, if you notice, there's the weight of the big column, and then over it is the freeway overpass. So, the very first homeless image I did was called, "Where Do You Live?" It was a homeless figure under a freeway overpass, and you saw a lot more of the overpass, and really felt just the weight of what was on him and his isolation, and the fact that that was his home right there.

Spirit: *Living under oppression as heavy as a concrete overpass.*

Christine: Yes. With all this traffic going over him. Right at Ninth and Brannon was where I photographed it, before they started clearing homeless people from under the freeway overpasses.

Spirit: *"Waterfront View" is another ironic title. You expect to see an idyllic seaside view, like the ones seen by millionaires in the Bay Area who buy homes near the water. Instead, a man with a shopping cart is looking out on the water. People flock to the Bay Area for its scenic beauty, but the poor are here, too, and they see an entirely different perspective. This man's view is more like Otis Redding's in "Dock of the Bay" when he was stranded and lonely and homesick at the water's edge.*

Christine: Exactly. Well, I definitely was trying to make a somewhat tongue-in-cheek or sarcastic class comment just the way you explained by saying, "Waterfront View." In fact, the structure that you see was at the end of Market Street — it is now gone because they've redone the whole waterfront — but that structure actually was a shelter for a group of homeless guys for a long time. In that painting, the homeless figures are actually right next to where they camped every night, and I used to see them all the time.

I just realized that the most favored image by people who buy art is images with water in them. So, I thought, I have to do at least one homeless image with a water view. So, that's how that evolved.

Spirit: *Couldn't you be a normal, happy artist and draw a really affluent couple looking over the pretty water? You had to put all this social meaning into it.*

Christine: But, you see, I've done (*laughing*) — I did nothing but traditional landscape and academic figurative work and still life. I've done even traditional cityscapes that are what tourists like to buy, but I didn't feel that was what I wanted to continue to do. I wanted to bring together more of what meant something to me.

Spirit: *Art and activism intermingle in your work. Why is it important for art to express your activist concerns?*

Christine: I feel that really good art transcends the time and the place and the historical conditions under which it is made. If there isn't art created during the time in which people are living, then there is never an historical record of that time. Photographs are one thing, but artists have a different role in society.

I know there are a lot of artists who feel that art comes from a transcendent place, so it should be transcendent and mysterious and non-literal and all of that. But I personally feel that narrative images, images with a story, images that people can actually read into, I personally feel they are very powerful, and that's why I use them. That's why I paint narratively; that's why I feel I want to produce art like that, because my goal is to draw people into images in a way that they can understand. Most people don't understand abstract art; they have a feeling for it. Most people don't understand a lot of conceptual art; they might understand part of it.

Post-modernism allows anything to occur. And I really like art that speaks on many different levels, that points to psychological, emotional, historical as well as personal issues, because nobody can look at a painting that depicts something and not self-reflect. They either reject it, or they feel into it. Do you know what I mean? That's why I feel narrative is important. And see how powerful narrative is — look what Hollywood does with films.

I'm not trying to manipulate people with my images. I'm just trying to get them into them. Narrative imagery is by nature recognizable because there is a story. There is something people can get into and see what's happening.

Spirit: *How do you define yourself as an artist? Your art has been exhibited with collections of realistic art. Is this social realism? Is it impressionism/realism?*

Christine: That's a good question. I do call myself a realist painter, but I am clearly not a photorealist. I know a lot of photorealist painters. The gallery that represents me is Jenkins-Johnson [in San Francisco], and they have shown many internationally renowned photorealists. But I am not a photorealist, because photorealism is making a comment on the way people see and the process of painting and photography. Their images can look narrative, but they are not really creating narrative images. They are taking an image created by a photograph and perfectly replicating it in paint.

Spirit: *What does realism as an artistic style mean to you?*

Christine: Realism allows many different styles. There is social realism, photorealism, hyperrealism, and there are all kinds of realisms in between. Jerome Witkin is a realist painter, but large areas in his images are like expressionist paintings. They are very, very loose and expressionistic. So, realism is a huge category. It really should be called representationalism, because the style in which someone paints is different than the broad category within which you can lump that.

I want to create environments and images that people can be pulled into, and I do that in any way I can. I hire models. I have my friends pose for me. I take all my own photographs. I create situations using my own photo references, and, like artists have done historically, I ask people, "Would you pose for me with such and such a coat on so I can paint?" Artists have done that throughout history. Their families, their friends, their artist friends become the models in their paintings. I've done that in many of my paintings.

Spirit: *How did the classical painters' use of "sacred geometry" influence you?*

Christine: When I started my graduate studies at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco, I met a professor named Mark Reynolds who has been studying and teaching this geometry for almost 20 years. This was something I had heard about for years, and was interested in studying; so when I met him, I realized I could begin to study this and try to incorporate it in my art. The Old Masters used this geometry to create images with ratios and compositional elements that made the work stronger and more harmonious.

Spirit: *Are you thinking of artists like Leonardo da Vinci?*

Christine: Yes, but I would say Piero della Francesca, who was actually a mathematician before he became a painter, and many artists from the Renaissance period. It was an esoteric science. It was like secret information that was passed on that artists used to express the manifest beauty and harmony in the world. The way the Old Masters used it was as a compositional element. When I was studying it in school, I analyzed many of the Old Masters' paintings. I would do grids over them, and would find out exactly where they placed specific elements, based on this geometry.

So that's how I created my paintings. I would figure out exactly where I was going to place specific elements based on this geometry. I can tell you how I designed certain paintings based on this geometry. This one is "Wet Night on Sutter Street."

Spirit: *This painting is such a strong image of someone homeless right next to opulence — the golden gleaming door handles and all the fancy suits.*

Christine: Well, this painting is a "golden section." A golden section is a specific ratio that is considered the most perfect ratio. A ratio just means a proportion of one length to another length. If I showed you a hundred rectangles of different shapes and proportions, this golden section is the one you would pick most of the time because the ratio is based on the proportions in our body, and the way plants grow.

This ratio is a number that goes on forever. These are called irrational numbers, and what that means is they are numbers that are infinite. They never repeat themselves, but they can be rounded off, and they can be created geometrically with a compass and a straight edge. This was the knowledge that Pythagoras and the Old Masters passed on, that these ratios come from. It's the energy that manifests nature, the ratios inherent in these proportions. It sounds really abstract, but it's not. It's based on natural forms and growth patterns, and the ratio in our body. And, you know the da Vinci image of the guy standing like this (*stands erect and stretches out arms*)?

Spirit: *Right. That's why I asked if da Vinci used this geometry.*

Christine: Yes. That's based on the pentagon, which is five-sided — five is the symbol of living things. Da Vinci was showing the ratio of the human body, which is based on the golden section, and you can create the golden section out of that form. The division of our belly button, from the floor up to the belly button, and from that point, to the top of our head — that's the golden section of the ideal form. Michelangelo's famous statue of David, and the Greeks, all those proportions, the way they designed their temples, i.e., the Parthenon, used the golden section and many of these proportions to create those monuments and temples. They are all about harmony and beautiful ratios.

So, I use that specifically in my paintings just as another way to draw people in; because people don't know they are looking at a golden section, but I don't care. They are still drawn into the image.

The head of the homeless person [in the painting "Wet Night on Sutter Street"] is actually in something called the "occult center." That is a compositional device. It is four points that float around the dead center, and many Old Masters used the occult centers to put important elements of their compositions, like the flame of a candle, or the tip of Christ's finger, or a watch being held by somebody that is dangling down, and it will fall right in these positions called the occult centers.

Spirit: *Why place the homeless person's head in the occult center?*

Christine: I tried to put my homeless figures or aspects of the homeless figures in the occult center, in one of the occult centers, of almost all my paintings. That was again to comment that the homeless are outside; they are hidden. Occult basically means a hidden, or obscured center.

Spirit: *The painting shows a homeless person sleeping in a blanket outside of a very expensive-looking clothing store.*

Christine: This piece shows where Willie Brown shops on Sutter Street. It's Wilkes-Bashford on Sutter Street.

Spirit: *The image of having a homeless man camped out in the doorway where Brown buys all these expensive suits is powerful. It's very important to show that poverty and heedless affluence coexist right next door to one another.*

Christine: Absolutely. Well, this was done in 1997, right around the same time I did "Rhonda's Place," and I really wanted to comment on the weather conditions that homeless people have to deal with. So, it's starting to rain a lot, and it starts to get wet on the street, and it just gets miserable for people on the street.

I was driving up Sutter Street one night, and I looked to my left. That was a time when there were a lot of homeless people encamped in doorways all up and down Sutter Street, actually more than there are now. I looked to my left, and I saw this person, and I just went, "Oh, my God!" And it was such a striking image. I pulled up, and I didn't really want to wake this person up to ask permission to photograph them, but, at the same time, I really wanted to paint this image.

So, what I did was, I got out of my car, and I walked down the street, and I just stood there, and I was thinking, "Oh, my God. This is just an amazing image. This says it all." There is this opulence behind this person in a cardboard box. There is their umbrella — they are clearly sleeping in the doorway because it's raining. And I just made the decision: I'm going to give back to the community somehow with these images, but I'm not going to ask permission because it won't be the same once the person gets up. So, I took two or three photographs, and I drove on, and I never disturbed the person.

I felt a little weird about it, but, at the same time, I thought, "You know, I've got to have this image. This is just too intense." Then I thought about it for several weeks, and I had the photos, and then what happened was I painted it in five days. It just poured out of me, and it was one of those images — I didn't struggle with it at all. The way the whole thing was situated was just a perfect composition for what I wanted. It fit into a golden section and the way I wanted to compose it. It just happened. So, I felt like this painting was meant to happen, because I just painted it effortlessly in five days. It's one of my favorite paintings that I did in 1997.

Spirit: *Why is it your favorite?*

Christine: Because I think it's the most like an Old Master painting to me — the light, the dark, the chiaroscuro, the class comment, the poignancy of it. I just love the image. It's so strong to me. It's kind of like "Rhonda's Place," that too. There's a poignancy about it, because there are clearly social status issues. Sheraton Palace is around the corner, and there is Rhonda. A guy sleeping in a cardboard box, and there's Wilkes-Bashford right behind him. You know, same kind of thing. So, I really love those two paintings. Those are my favorites.

Spirit: *It says it all about the rich and the poor.*

Christine: It says everything about the relationship of the homelessness issue to wealth, the decadence of our society. I mean, these people don't have to be on the street. They could all be in shelters. We've got the money for it. And where do people go for shelter? They go in the doorways or around the corners from hotels and stores that the average person can't even walk in and consider buying something. That's why it says it all to me.

Spirit: *What kind of paintings are you working on now?*

Christine: I feel that the issue of homelessness is just one social issue that I chose to focus on and, that, in reality, there are any number of things I could have used, so I have done paintings since that comment on environmental degradation, or paintings that comment on the business relationship to the economy here. The imagery I'm interested in always has some social relationship.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: BUILD IT, PRESERVE IT, TAKE IT BACK

The National Day Of Housing is celebrated with direct action at HUD office in S.F.



A homeless man in San Francisco holds up a one-word sign asking for help: "HUNGRY."

Lydia Gans photos



Homeless man sits in a doorway near a sign saying, "God Bless America."

by Alexandra Cuff, PoorNewsNetwork

My feet seemed to trail behind the rest of my body as I walked up the bike lane on Polk Street on November 20, on my way to a protest celebrating the National Day of Housing. I turned onto Grove Street and walked up toward the imposing figure of a building where I spotted a couple dozen or so bobbing protest signs. I approached the gathering of people on the ramp leading up to the Federal Building, which is always more welcoming with a group of protesters outside.

"Get up, get down, there's a housing crisis in this town!" rang out the chants.

People in cities from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., gathered on November 20 to demand an end to HUD Secretary Mel Martinez's obstruction of the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Here in San Francisco, in a courageous act of direct resistance, a sit-in took place outside the HUD office on the 9th floor of the Federal Building. The six who put themselves on the line so that our voices could be heard, were arrested for trespassing on federal property; they were cited and released within two hours. They were demanding a teleconference with Mel Martinez who told Congress not to fund housing because it is a "local problem."

The National Housing Trust Fund proposes to produce, rehabilitate, and preserve 1,500,000 units of housing by 2010. The Trust Fund would allocate at least 75 percent of funds to those with incomes under 30 percent of the area median. Within that, 30 percent of total Trust Fund dollars would be used for housing that is affordable to households that earn less than $10,701 a year — equivalent to a year of full-time minimum wage earnings.

The remaining funds would be used for low-income households with incomes up to 80 percent of the area median. All of these funds are restricted to housing production, preservation, or rehabilitation in low-income neighborhoods.

The increase of homeless and poor folk, including families, youth, seniors and mentally and physically disabled persons, is directly related to the decline of HUD and low-income housing in the past 25 years. Welfare reform, specifically the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act that was passed with TANF in 1998, prohibits immigrants from receiving public housing and reserves 60 percent of all project-based housing for households making between 30-80 percent of the median income. Full-time workers at minimum wage make only 10-13 percent of the area median income.

According to the S.F. Department of Human Services and the National Low Income Housing Coalition, you would have to earn $28.06 per hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment in San Francisco. With families reaching the end of their time-limited TANF benefits and entering the workforce where wages have been decreasing for the past 30 years, the housing crisis should be seen for what it is — a national emergency.

Now, imagine these conditions without the help of General Assistance, which has just been slashed to $59 a month with the passing of the heart-warming Care Not Cash/Proposition N.

Protesters demanded an end to HUD Secretary Mel Martinez's obstruction of the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund. Martinez told Congress not to fund housing because it is a "local problem."

While the six brave folk sat up on the 9th floor of the Federal Building waiting confrontation from Martinez, a score of us stood close together outside speaking and singing about our personal experiences and the punitive approach policymakers have taken toward poverty and homelessness.

George Jones talked about the 450 families living in SRO hotels (single room occupancies). SRO hotel units are very small and cramped rooms intended for a single person, but are known to house families with up to seven people.

Anita, a seemingly shy recent immigrant, came up and spoke passionately about how fortunate she was to be in an SRO because of all the people she sees on the street and in the shelters. Because she is housed, she said, she can do what she wants in life and go to college. Then the Po' Poets of *POOR Magazine* rolled up and we heard spoken word resistance from Dharma and Charles.

Randal, a volunteer at the Coalition on Homelessness (COH) who is "formerly homeless, yet technically still homeless" because he has not yet stayed 30 days in an SRO to establish tenancy, doesn't consider an SRO to be housing. "I think of housing with a kitchen, bathroom, a place I can have friends over," he said. Getting kicked out of SROs just before you reach a 30-day stay is a common practice referred to as "musical chairs." It ensures tenants will not be eligible for protection under the Rental Code. Randal added, "I did not go to college to be homeless, poor, to pretend not to see things I see."

James Sherman, a member of the COH, has been homeless for eight years. "Homelessness is not fun," he said, describing the "homeless anger, police anger, public anger, and political anger" you experience when you are on the street. He pointed out that folks on SSI, SSD, and seniors have all earned the right to a house. "Not everyone knows how to get it but everyone deserves it."

The proactive response to our ongoing housing emergency was organized by Right to a Roof, a housing workgroup of the COH which organizes around federal housing programs, budget cuts, and their impact on the housing crisis in San Francisco. Their advocacy for the creation and preservation of affordable housing includes advocacy for cooperative housing in the City's housing strategy.

They are a founding organization in the SF Land Trust Collaborative which is working to establish a network of local community land trusts in the Haight Ashbury, Bay View/Hunter's Point, Mission, Excelsior, Tenderloin, and South of Market, with the goal of having at least one functioning community land trust established by the end of the year.

In addition to the strain put on the poor from welfare reform, federal housing budget cuts, and an absence of living wage jobs, our access to consistent, affordable housing is hindered by contracts that HUD has entered into with private landlords. In these cases, our tax dollars cover the cost of renovating units that landlords are committed to rent to Section 8 tenants. The catch is that the contracts expire, after which the lord of the land (!) will naturally rent out the units at market rate or above market rate rents. This further lowers the number of low-cost units available to an increasingly low- and no-income population.

With a functioning community land trust, affordable housing can exist independently of the for-profit market. As persons employed at the Federal Building left work that evening, many averted their eyes from our signs: "Housing: Build it, Preserve it, Take it back!"

Without recognition of and advocacy for housing as a basic human right, homelessness will continue to result from local, state, and federal public policy.

The housing crisis does not only affect those born into poverty. I grew up middle class in a predominantly white neighborhood on Long Island. My parents lost their home in 1998, but they are not homeless today. They had a safety net — a safety net not provided by government assistance but by a more natural system called community. My mother, father, and two younger brothers moved into the three-bedroom house of their best friends.

During this time, with support extending beyond my immediate family, my father was able to seek treatment for alcohol addiction. Living communally, the addiction could no longer be hidden and my mother was given the emotional support to continue to work and care for herself and my brothers while living displaced and no doubt feeling ashamed. Society dictates that poverty and homelessness are shameful states.

Most folk do not have this safety net my parents were fortunate to have — especially those living in cities where space and resources are extremely limited (except for a small wealthy minority) and the immigrants who do not always have family in town. We, as a community, are responsible for the role that my parents' friends played during our housing crisis.

The role does not necessarily have to be taking houseless families into your home (I can't see that happening in such an individuated culture), nor should it necessarily mean voting to pour money into shelters or transitional housing. Housing, not a mat on a shelter floor, is a basic human right.

We need to ensure that a family's needs and the consequent natural support of a caring community dictate the assistance that should be provided by our government. Until federal policy addresses the need for a radical new affordable housing program for ALL in need, we need to work in our communities to educate, organize, advocate, and as we say at *Poor*, "report and support" to ensure habitable housing within healthy neighborhoods for everyone.

This gathering of resistance was just one of many steps to push for the passing of the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund which was defeated by only one vote in November. It's going to be reintroduced in January.

All conscious folk are welcome to the next Right to a Roof planning meeting held on Wednesdays at 5 p.m. at COH. For more information call (415) 346-3740 x314.

To learn more about the SF Land Trust Collaborative, go to www.sflandtrust.org.